

THE  
HARKSBOROUGH  
COMMITTEE

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DWIGHT E. MARVIN



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# THE HARKSBOROUGH COMMITTEE

BY  
DWIGHT EDWARDS MARVIN



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# THE HARKSBOROUGH COMMITTEE

## CHAPTER I

### THE HARKSBOROUGH COMMITTEE

THE pulpit of Harksborough Church had suddenly become vacant. Not that the Reverend Richard Downey, D.D., had resigned on account of any expressed dissatisfaction with his preaching. On the contrary, he was considered one of the most popular ministers in the place. During the ten years of his pastorate he had faithfully and monotonously read each of his three hundred and eighty sermons three times over to his languid parishioners, who had as regularly nodded assent to his statements and rubbed their hands in satisfaction over his scholastic attainments. Neither had ill health caused Dr. Downey to sever his connection with the parish, for no man over forty years of



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age was more vigorous of body or better able to attend to the social requirements of his position.

The fact was, having spent the greater part of two years in continuous efforts to "better his condition," he had at last secured a call from another church and, feeling sure that the members had been divinely guided in thus honoring him with their confidence, he acceded to their request and announced to his people that he would preach on "The Directing Hand of Providence." On the following Sabbath, he spoke with unusual earnestness and conviction and then, tearfully presented his resignation. A few weeks later he left Harksborough for his new field of labor.

Scarcely had the members of the church recovered from the shock of the separation, than they became aware that they were subjects of special consideration by a large number of outsiders who wrote lengthy epistles expressing their deep sympathy for the church because of Dr. Downey's departure, and ventured a word of

advice regarding his successor. They had believed for years that their pastor was the only man fitted to their needs, and were somewhat surprised on being informed that there were others who, because of special gifts and experiences, were quite as able, if not better able, to carry on the work.

As almost every mail brought letters filled with advice, the church members appointed a committee to sift all the applications and recommendations that were received, and designate such men as seemed suitable for the place. The committee appointed consisted of Jonathan Ritchie, a trustee; Henry Stickler, a deacon; and Bently Moore, who represented the young people.

A retired clergyman by the name of Goodwin was engaged to regularly supply the pulpit, and the committee turned its attention to inquiry regarding the qualifications of different men.

After several informal meetings, Mr. Moore was directed to answer all letters, which he did. Then he made a private

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list of the correspondents whom he considered most direct, definite, manly and business-like in their statements. After which he prepared a set of resolutions for the government of the committee. They were as follows:

*First.* As those who write to us show an interest in our church, we will answer all communications promptly and clearly, but without promise or encouragement, seasoning our speech with salt.

*Second.* As "in the multitude of counselors there is safety," we will ask our fellow-members to designate on slips of paper the kind of minister that they think is required for the church, that we may have something to govern us in our selection.

*Third.* As our people are neither princes nor paupers, free-handed nor miserly, we will ask them for some definite information regarding the salary that they are willing to pay and the salary that they want to pay, so that we may not be led into the error of recommending a minister who thinks that he is worth more than the

*willing* sum, nor one whom others think is worth less than the *want* sum. We furthermore depend on the church to stick to the figures that are furnished.

*Fourth.* As we do not want any man whose people are restless under his ministry, or who is himself restless under difficulties, we will not as a rule consider the name of any applicant who has not been in his present field more than five years.

*Fifth.* As nearly all the letters of commendation that we have received have been filled with laudatory statements rather than with definite information, we will hereafter send to all who write to us, a series of printed questions regarding the minister under consideration, as follows:

1. How long has he been preaching?
2. What is his mental equipment?
3. Does he want to change his pastorate? If so, why?
4. How many years has he been in his present charge?
5. Has he had any practical experience in leading people to Christ?



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6. Do business men have confidence in his methods?

7. Can he talk on the subject of personal religion, or does he confine himself to religion in general?

8. Are his chief admirers men, women or children?

9. Does he know the members of his Sunday-school when he meets them on the street?

10. In his preaching does he refer more frequently to what the Bible says or to what he thinks God meant?

11. What is the character of his sermons? Are they theological, theoretical, expository, practical or sentimental?

12. In his sermon appeals does he have real heart power or only vociferating power?

13. Does he read, recite, declaim, lecture or preach in the pulpit?

*Sixth.* As it is easier for three men than for three hundred to settle on a pastor, we agree to hear ministers in their own pulpits before letting the congrega-

tion hear them in the Harksborough pulpit.

*Seventh.* As we cannot afford to have two or more men for pastors, we will commend but one at a time. A splintered vote is apt to lead to a splintered congregation. Splinters make admirable kindlings, and kindlings sometimes create a blaze.

*Eighth.* When the people think enough of a man to call him, we agree to formulate a statement of the exact spiritual, financial and social condition of the church, so far as we are able, and present it to him, so that he will be able to judge correctly as to his duty. Belated discoveries engender regrets and criticisms.

In accordance with the second resolution, slips were distributed among the church members and one hundred and ten opinions regarding the kind of a man that the church required, were returned. These were arranged and tabulated by the committee as follows:

Twenty want some one who can preach.

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Seventeen want a house-to-house pastor.

Fourteen want an orthodox man.

Seven want some one who will take an interest in the Sunday-school.

Seven want an up-to-date man.

Six want a broad-minded man.

Six want any one who suits the majority.

Five want a Doctor of Divinity.

Five want a good man.

Four want a popular man.

Four want some one who knows something about music.

Three want an all-around man.

Three want some one who will preach short sermons.

Three want a money-raiser.

Three want a well appearing man.

Three want a soul-winner.

As the personal hearing of ministers in their own pulpits seemed desirable, the committee arranged to absent itself from home three months, or even four, if necessary, attend the services of different churches, listen to preachers, study the methods employed by them in reaching the



people, and seek to familiarize itself with the spiritual condition of their parishes. This last purpose seemed important as they realized that, while the success of a pastor often depended to a large extent on local conditions, the character of his ministry would show itself to some extent, in the life and ideals of his church members.

## CHAPTER II

## THE EAGLETOWN PRAYER MEETING

“WELL, well, well!” exclaimed Mr. Ritchie, as he stood with his companions on the platform of the railway station at Eagletown and drew in a long breath and then patted his chest. “This air is enough to give inspiration to any minister. I’ll wager anything that you won’t find a man in this town who isn’t vigorous in both his body and mind. If I’m not mistaken, we won’t have to travel another mile to get the right preacher for Harksborough. We’ll find him here if we find him anywhere. Hey, sir! Have you got any good hotels in Eagletown?”

The question was addressed to the station master, who stepped forward.

“Good hotel? Well, I should think so!” he replied, pointing to a large country hostelry that could be seen through the

trees a short distance down the road. "You won't find any better joint for twenty miles around than Griglie's, and he knows it."

"Thank you, thank you," returned Mr. Ritchie, "we'll go over and see. By the way, perhaps you could give us some information about the ministers in Eagletown? My, but this air ought to make them all first-class!" and he threw out his chest and took another long breath.

"Don't know about that," he answered, "the air's been here for a good many years, to my certain knowledge, but the parsons don't seem to be any nearer first-class than when they came. Perhaps it's because they'd done all their improving before they discovered the town. Now there's the Methodist preacher. He can holler loud enough to rip off the shingles and topple over the chimney, but he could do just as well eighteen months ago as he can now. He hasn't learned yet that making a racket isn't the same thing as sawing wood and splitting it. And there's the Baptist elder. He's great on revivals.

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Gets 'em up every year and ropes in the same converts, as they call 'em, each time. My wife goes to his church and she says that he's all right, but she said that the first time she heard him. And there's the 'Piscopal fellow; he says he does things he oughtn't to do and leaves undone the things he ought to do, so he isn't first-class yet. He's got the folks kinder down on him because he won't let the girls sing in the choir and says that the women mustn't come to church in summer with their hats off. And there's the Presbyterian minister. He does a deal of studyin' and thinkin'. Folks say that he can prove straight out of the Scriptures that what is to be will be, but it don't seem to me that that's anything to prove, as nobody that I can find thinks that it wouldn't be. Most folks calls the 'Piscopal Church the church of the élite and the Presbyterian Church the church of the elect. You can take your choice lest you want to go to one of the others, and there's ten of 'em within a stone's throw of each other. First you go to Griglie's. He isn't much on what

you call pious, but he'll give you a good roast and roost."

"Hum!" ejaculated Mr. Stickler, as he walked with his two friends towards the hostelry. "You may like the air if you please, but I don't. It's vile. I'll just bet you a new hat that we've wasted our time coming here. I wish that we'd read that letter we received about Soarer more carefully before we started. I don't believe he's much. Any man would spoil in six months if he had to stay in this town. I know that I should fall from grace in three if I had to breathe this rank pine odor all the time. I begin to feel sick already."

"Sorry," returned Mr. Ritchie, as he paused to look around, "what keeps one man alive kills another. Salt water is mighty refreshing for mackerel, but it's death to kittens, kind of rank to them, as you may say."

In a few moments they reached Griglie's tavern and were assigned rooms. After bathing their hands and faces and removing the dust and cinders from their



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clothing, they went down stairs and entered the dining-room, where they did ample justice to the meal that had been provided.

Stepping out on the wide porch Bently Moore reminded his companions that they had come to Eagletown on Friday so as to be able to hear the Rev. Mr. Soarer speak in the weekly meeting of his church, and, as it was a full hour before the time of service, suggested that they should walk about the village and look at the different meeting-houses.

“As we are desirous of discovering the religious condition of the communities that we visit as well as to hear the sermons,” he observed, “it would be well for us to begin at once to familiarize ourselves with the exterior of the different places of worship. You can often tell the spiritual character of a religious organization,” he continued, “by the way it takes care of its property. An attractive building and a carefully kept church-yard indicates thrift and well-ordered and interesting services, while a neglected meeting-house and un-

tidy grounds indicate religious shiftlessness and irregularity in the order of worship that grate on one's sensibilities. Putty and paint do more than preserve wood; they often proclaim the inner life of people."

The good sense of Mr. Moore's proposal was recognized and the three men started on a tour of investigation. By means of the sign-boards on the church buildings they were soon able to locate most of the undertakers within a radius of four miles. That evening Bently Moore made the following entry in his note-book:

"Instruct the trustees of the Harksborough Church that its work is not so much to bury the dead as to raise the dead—to care for men rather than mummies and advertise the same."

Scarcely had they made the circuit of the town when they heard the church bells and turned their steps toward a plain white meeting-house where the Rev. Mr. Soarer preached. There were some twenty people in the room when they entered and took seats near the door.



As soon as the minister stepped on the platform he noticed that there were strangers present. Surmising their errand, he at once became very nervous and fumbled his watch chain and the leaves of his hymn-book; then he tapped the floor with his foot, put his lips together, drew down his brow and remained in serious thought for a few moments. Finally he went over to a young woman, who had seated herself at the cabinet organ, and whispered in her ear.

The room was soon filled with people, and the services began. Singing was followed by Scripture reading. Then there was more singing, followed by prayer. At last the pastor arose and ignoring the topic that had been announced the previous Sabbath, tried to repeat portions of sermons that he had recently preached.

Quietly and in a natural tone of voice, but with force and earnestness, he warned his hearers against expecting peace of conscience while indulging in selfish propensities, and charged them not to look for lasting happiness in worldly practices.

Then he dwelt on the importance of prayer and the absolute need of frankness with God. Forgetting the presence of strangers, he referred to an incident connected with his work. The pathos of the story touched the hearts of all, and it would have been well had he closed his address, but, glancing across the room, he observed that the three visitors were giving him the closest attention. It pleased but embarrassed him, and he determined to deepen the favorable impression that he believed he had made. Raising his voice, and sawing the air with his hand he talked on. Realizing that he was not accomplishing what he intended, he spoke still louder and began to emphasize his words by pounding the desk. When he sought only to help the people he was eloquent; when he tried to make a favorable impression he became commonplace and weak.

At last he waved his hand toward the ceiling and with one final effort, exclaimed: "Oh, my brethren, I charge you for your own good. Fly away from the turmoil

of daily life to the mount of God and bathe in the ocean of His love. Fly away from all spiritual conceits and bury yourselves in self-examination. Fly away from all wicked thoughts and sinful perplexities to some barren solitude, and drink of the stream that flows from the celestial city. Fly away from your own wretched thoughts to the chamber of communion, and under the light of the star lit heavens hold fellowship with your Maker. Fly away, I say. Fly away and be at rest."

With another flourish of his hand he sat down and mopped his brow with his handkerchief; then he called on a man in the back of the room to lead in prayer. The prayer being offered, Mr. Soarer stated that he had observed some strangers and would be glad to hear a word from any of them.

Mr. Ritchie arose at once, and was about to make some remarks when he was asked to come forward, which he did. Just as he reached the platform, some one who had been dozing called out:

“Please sing one verse of hymn number ninety-three.”

He meant to say “hymn number thirty-nine.” It so happened that hymn number ninety-three was intended for use at christening services.

In the confusion of the moment the minister repeated the number that was given without looking in the hymn-book, and Mr. Ritchie stood on the platform and smiled beneficently as he waited. With one voice they sang:

“This child we dedicate to Thee,  
O God of grace and purity;  
Shield it from harm and threatening wrong  
And let thy love its life prolong.”

Several young people laughed, others raised their voices to drown the sound of levity, others held their books high and looked over the tops at Mr. Ritchie’s beaming countenance while they bit their lips in determined effort to hold themselves in control. Mr. Soarer turned very red in the face and tried to interrupt the singing, but failed. Mr. Ritchie, in obliviousness



of what was being sung, became radiant at the evident enjoyment of the people and his face glowed with pleasure.

When the singing was finished he spoke of his appreciation of the privilege of being present at the service and his delight at being permitted to hear the address of the pastor; then he made a few remarks on the necessity of fellowship with God, and took his seat.

After prayer another hymn was sung, and an old man arose. He was the senior deacon of the church, respected and loved by all. There was instant quiet and attention. His trembling hand grasped the chair in front. He removed his spectacles and looked at the congregation. Then he spoke with paternal tenderness and affection of the goodness of God, how the Eternal Father had strengthened him in repeated trials, and led him through many hard experiences and had at last brought him, at the age of four score, to realize His continued abiding presence, how he had learned to trust the guiding hand of his heavenly Parent for the future, and would

trust it until he came to see the divine glory. Finally he led the congregation in prayer, talking with God as with one who seemed real and near with whom he was conversing. After reminding God, in simplest language, of his daily prayer for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the church and community, he prayed that a special blessing might rest on the beloved pastor and visiting strangers, and closed with a personal consecration of himself to God in words that thrilled the hearts of all who were present and made the little room seem like some holy of holies.

“Fine meeting,” remarked Mr. Ritchie, as he walked with his companions back to the tavern. “Soarer gave us an excellent talk, full of practical suggestions and all that sort of thing. I think that it would be just as well for us to stay over Sunday and hear him preach.”

“Well,” returned Mr. Stickler, “I don’t want to be obstreperous. You two gentlemen can stay if you want to do so, but it don’t seem to me worth while to waste the time. Soarer may have given us an

excellent discourse, but on the whole it didn't strike me that it would do in our church. Ritchie, I'd rather have you as my pastor, if you'd promise not to have any singing come before your sermons. What do you think about it, Moore?"

"Better fly away to Vinton Village and hear Newhall. You know Dr. Butler wrote he was to preach there. I believe he's next on our list," replied the young man, "but if you want to know whom I'd like for a pastor, I'll tell you. I'd like the old man. He'd do more to make me a better Christian than any minister that I know anything about. I wonder what made Soarer go on after he got through, and try to make the mill run by blowing on the wheels. The deacon could have given him a point or two."

The next morning the Rev. Mr. Soarer threw aside the two sermons that he had prepared for the next Sunday. Then he looked over his manuscripts and selected others that he thought would create a more favorable impression. Having thus adjusted himself to circumstances, he



donned his best clothes and proceeded to Griglie's tavern for the purpose of paying his respects to the committee and inviting the members to occupy the pastor's pew on the coming Sunday. What was his dismay, on reaching the place, to discover that the three strangers had left town immediately after breakfast.

## CHAPTER III

## ON THE WAY TO VINTON VILLAGE

"CARRIAGE to Vinton Village? Carriage, sir?" called out a burly driver as he pointed the stock end of his whip toward a three-seated vehicle, and at the same time reached out his hand to take Mr. Stickler's suit-case.

"How much will you charge to drive the three of us over?" Mr. Stickler inquired, as he peered at the man from under his dripping umbrella.

"Three to Vinton Village? Seventy-five cents each," returned the man, as he again attempted to possess himself of the suit-case.

Instead of yielding to the driver's wishes, Mr. Stickler drew back and said to his companions in a low voice:

"Seventy-five cents for each of us, two and a quarter for the three, and it's only three miles over. It's the most extrava-

gant charge that I ever knew, perfect robbery!"

Mr. Ritchie, being more intent on getting under cover than anything else, heard only the words "seventy-five cents" and thrust his hand into his pocket, saying as he did so:

"Extremely fortunate. Three miles is more than I want to walk in this rain and mud. Gentlemen, we're in luck to have a conveyance waiting for us."

"Carriage? Carriage to Vinton Village?" This time the driver addressed an old lady accompanied by a bright-faced young woman, who was coming from the waiting room and who was looking around anxiously as though expecting some one.

"Have you seen Mr. Stillman's carriage anywhere about here?" the old lady asked, as she glanced first at the three men and then at the driver.

"No," the man answered, "and what's more, I don't reckon he'll be here with the roads in such a condition. Better let me drive you over. There's three seats, and if one of those gentlemen don't mind sit-

ting with me in front there'll be plenty of room."

"Let me sit in front," said Mr. Ritchie, as he lowered his umbrella and turned his genial face toward the newcomers. The water that had dripped on his spectacles and that stood in great drops on his cheeks looked like tears of merriment that had remained to tell of some recent burst of laughter, and the two ladies smiled as they turned toward him.

"No, indeed!" broke in Mr. Stickler, as he sought, in the spirit of gallantry, to push his companion aside. "That's my seat by right of inquiry. I was the first to speak to the driver."

"Boys are always under the special charge of the whip," said Bently Moore, as he stepped forward, "if the ladies will accept of my assistance and take the middle seat, and if you gentlemen will climb into the back one, I'll watch the horses."

"There's plenty of room in the carriage, grandma," the young woman remarked in a loud, clear voice as she drew her aged companion toward the vehicle.

The horses jogged along the muddy road with an even gait, as though they were quite used to the work in which they were engaged. The driver kept up a continual clicking sound with his mouth, occasionally varying the exercise by snapping his whip and calling out to the plodding beasts, "Git up there, git up!" The demand seemed to produce no other effect on the animals than to cause them to toss their heads, shake their bodies and splash the mud a little harder.

They had gone about a mile when Bently Moore turned around and remarked to the old lady who was sitting in an upright position with her eyes closed:

"This is a fine shower that we are having. It will be appreciated by the farmers after the drought. The grass needs it very much."

"Hey?" she returned, opening her eyes.

"The gentleman said that the grass needed rain very much," Mr. Ritchie explained.

"Hey?" she repeated, still more emphatically as she turned toward him, and



adjusted her spectacles so as to get a better view of his face.

"Oh, yes, yes, certainly," he answered, not understanding her reply. "Yes, certainly, of course. The rain will help the grass so that it will make better hay."

"What's that? Hey? hey? hey?" she exclaimed, turning quickly from one to another.

"Git up there, git up," shouted the driver.

"Grandma, the gentleman said that the grass needed the rain very much," explained the young woman, in a clear voice. Then addressing Mr. Ritchie she remarked, "Grandma is a little hard of hearing."

"I understand," the old lady replied. "I understand. The rain's good for nothing when the grass is in its present condition. Of course it's ruined by this time." Then she settled back in her seat, the driver gave another crack with his whip, and there was silence for a few moments.

Finally Mr. Ritchie touched the young woman on the shoulder, and with good-



humored familiarity said, "We are strangers, having just arrived from Eagletown. Are you familiar with Vinton Village?"

"Yes, somewhat," she replied, as her bright eyes encountered those of her questioner. "I live in Westwood, but Grandma lives in Vinton Village. She has been visiting us, and I'm going home with her for a little visit."

"Ah, indeed!" he returned. "From Westwood, you say? Perhaps you know a certain clergyman who lives there, by the name of Van Cloud, Rev. Woolworth Van Cloud?"

"I should think I did," she exclaimed with delight. "He's my father. Do you know him?"

"Your father! Well, that's a coincidence," he replied. "No, I'm not acquainted with him except by reputation. I hope, however, to have the privilege of meeting him a week from to-morrow, when my friends and I anticipate the pleasure of hearing him preach. We will be glad to tell him of this pleasant meet-

ing. He will occupy his own pulpit on that day, will he not?"

"Why, yes, I suppose so," she answered. "He said nothing about being away, when I left home."

"Hey? What's that?" broke in the old lady.

"The gentleman says that he expects to be in Westwood and hear father preach a week from Sunday," she explained.

"No. I've just come from there," she returned. "What does he want me to go back for?"

Mr. Ritchie cleared his throat, leaned over toward the old lady, and in a loud, cheery voice explained, "I was just saying that I was expecting to go to Westwood myself next week."

"Oh, that's another matter," she returned, and settled back in her seat again, while the driver clicked at his horses and snapped his whip.

"I understand that there's a clergyman at Vinton Village by the name of Newhall," said Mr. Stickler, in determination to keep up the conversation and secure

information. "A Rev. Nathaniel Crane Newhall. Can you tell us in which church he preaches?"

"Perhaps it's in the Scranton Road Church," she answered. "There are only three churches in the place, and I'm very sure that it isn't either of the other two. The Scranton Road Church is the one Grandma attends, and it is without a pastor. I believe the people are hearing candidates."

"Oh, then I shall hope to see you to-morrow," observed Bently Moore, as he tipped his hat in acknowledgment of the anticipated pleasure.

"Hey? What's that?" broke in the old lady.

The young woman's cheeks turned a deeper tinge as she raised her voice and remarked, "The gentlemen expect to attend the services of the Scranton Road Church to-morrow, and want to know whether we will be there."

"If the Lord permits, I shall be in His sanctuary on the holy Sabbath," she returned, as she crossed her hands in her

lap in testimony of her piety. "I hope that the gentlemen don't think that I'm a heathen and a publican."

There was silence for some time. The rain had cleared away and the blue sky showed itself in patches between the overhanging clouds. The sunlight, shining through a rift, caused the foliage to sparkle in the reflection of its silver glow and led the travelers to roll up the curtains of the carriage and look out on the landscape. As the vehicle turned the summit of the hill the men looked down on the little village of Vinton, nestling among the trees in the valley and surrounded by farm and pasture lands.

"Isn't it just lovely," exclaimed the young woman as the hamlet came in sight. "I think that there's no place in the world like Vinton. And there's Grandma's house right down there by that large red barn, a little to the left. You can tell it by the big tree in the road. The stream is just a little way back."

"Oh, yes, yes, I see it," exclaimed the men.

“What a good God we have to make such a beautiful world,” remarked Mr. Ritchie in the spirit of religious fervor as he gazed at the clustered houses and the surrounding hills, now smiling in the brightness of the returning sunlight.

“Hey? What’s that?” again broke in the old lady.

“I was saying—” began Mr. Ritchie.

“A little louder!” she interrupted.

“Git up there, git up,” shouted the driver, as if in answer to the request.

“I was just saying,” he repeated, “that God was very good to make such a beautiful world.”

“It was built by my father in eighteen hundred and thirty-five,” she replied. “I was a mere chit of a child then, in blue frocks. I remember it well. That wing that you see by the tree I put on myself when I was first married.”

In a few moments the carriage swung into the main street and after stopping in front of the old lady’s house, went on to the tavern where the three men found comfortable entertainment.



Sunday morning was bright and beautiful. The mud had nearly disappeared, and the trees and shrubbery, washed by the recent rain, shone with brighter green.

Mr. Ritchie went to the window, before he had completed his dressing, and, looking out, declared to himself that there never was such a charming day. His heart glowed with warmth and pleasure as he took a long breath of clear country air. Then he looked up and down the road.

"God is good! God is good!" he repeated aloud as he leaned further out over the sill.

Just at that moment he noticed a boy driving some cows to pasture. He was coming down the road toward the tavern and Mr. Ritchie waited.

"Good morning, my fine fellow," he called out. "Good morning! It's a charming day, isn't it?"

The boy turned and looked at him in evident astonishment.

Intent on securing some kind of companionship in his pleasure, Mr. Ritchie beckoned to the lad and at the same time

flung a coin out into the road. "There! That's for the joy of living," he said, as the money rolled off into a rut.

The boy was either slow of comprehension or was stupefied by Mr. Ritchie's generosity, for he only glanced at the coin and turned his gaze again toward the window.

Mr. Ritchie laughed heartily and pointing toward the money called out:

"That's for you, my fine fellow, for you. God's goodness ought to make us all happy on such a morning as this."

The lad slowly walked over to where the silver piece lay glittering in the hardened mud, and after looking again at Mr. Ritchie, as if to make sure of his sanity and sincerity, picked it up and said in a low voice, "Thank you, sir," and immediately ran after the cows as if he were afraid that he might be called back.

## CHAPTER IV

## SERMON AND SOCIABILITY

WHEN the church bell rang its closing triple call to service, the three men entered the Scranton Road Church. The small auditorium was well filled with country folk. On the other side of the room from that on which Mr. Ritchie and his friends had entered, old Mrs. Van Cloud sat bolt upright, at the end of a pew near the pulpit. Her garments were of a fashion that prevailed a quarter of a century before. Two white curls fell outside her quaint bonnet, concealing a portion of the bows of her gold spectacles that were held far back on her small well-formed nose. Her whole appearance was that of antiquated gentility and self-conscious importance. Her granddaughter Emily sat by her side looking prettier, if possible,

than she did the day before. The girl's youthful appearance, composure of countenance and graceful posture distinguished her from others, while her well-fitted white lawn dress and airily trimmed straw hat contrasted charmingly with the costume of her aged companion and the more showy garments of the young people in the congregation.

Soon the preacher of the day entered the pulpit. He was a man not over twenty-seven years of age, with an intelligent countenance, clean-shaven face and bright eyes that twitched with nervous embarrassment as he took his seat and bowed his head in silent prayer. His well-brushed frock coat, high-cut waistcoat and evenly folded white cravat showed that he recognized the importance of care in the matter of ministerial dress.

Having raised his head, he opened a hymn-book and turned, or rather jerked, the leaves over until he found the first hymn that was to be announced, and marking the place with a slip of paper, closed the volume and laid it on the table

at his side. Glancing through the pulpit notices he arranged them in order and then took his sermon that was carefully folded in a limp-leather cover, and put it on a shelf behind the desk.

Having thus prepared himself for the duties of the hour, he looked at the congregation. In a moment his eyes fell on Emily Van Cloud, who at once became deeply interested in her gloves. Then he drank some water from a glass that stood on the table and turned his attention to the other side of the room where he observed the three strangers who, he perceived did not belong to the farming community about the village and wondered who they were and where they came from.

Finally the organ began to play. The congregation arose and sang the doxology, and the young minister led the devotions of the people with reverence, but with constraint.

When the time for preaching came, he laid his handkerchief on the table, took another swallow of water, and placed his manuscript on the open Bible. Then he



announced his text which was found in the First Epistle of Peter, the second chapter and the fifteenth verse. Then he told the people that he would speak on the subject of "The Abecedarian ignorance of the Church regarding fundamental truths."

The sermon had been prepared with great care and had evidently cost the young man many hours of work, but it showed that, while he was not without ability, he was more anxious to promulgate his theories than to bring his hearers nearer to God. As he came to the end of his discourse, he stepped back from the desk, stretched out both his hands and with one final oratorical effort, quoted a dozen lines from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and then called the congregation to prayer. His borrowed statements, positive assertions, striking quotations and forced eloquence, together with the earnestness of conviction with which he seemed to speak, impressed many of the people with a sense of his great ability, but left them self-satisfied and indifferent to the claims of Christ on their lives.

Scarcely had the service closed than Mr. Ritchie turned to his companions with a smile, and said, "Well, now, that's what I call preaching. Fine, wasn't it?"

Mr. Stickler shrugged his shoulders and replied, "Perhaps, but I'll be hanged if I could make out what the man was driving at."

Bently Moore said nothing, but that evening he entered in his note-book: "Heard a fellow by the name of Newhall to-day. Large upper story filled with cobwebs. Outside walls in good state of preservation, but an excessive number of angles. Clapboards fresh and free from dust marks, but showed evidences of being prepared for inspection. Strange how some men are always trying to make people recognize their ability and accept their notions, when simplicity, directness and practicability count for so much more in the world."

As the three men walked down the aisle, Mr. Ritchie turned to one and another in the congregation and greeted them with a smiling face and hearty handshake. His

cordiality won recognition for him on every hand, and his words of commendation about the preacher and the sermon were appreciated. Mr. Stickler spoke only to those who spoke to him, and wedged his way through the throng as rapidly as he could without seeming to be in haste. But Bently Moore held back with the evident intention of meeting Mrs. Van Cloud and Emily.

In a few moments he came face to face with the old lady and her granddaughter, but the minister was with them and he could do no more than shake hands and renew the acquaintance that he had made on the previous day. It was evident that their companion was being entertained or had been invited to dine at the Van Cloud mansion, for he accompanied them on their return home.

Reaching the tavern, Mr. Moore asked Mr. Ritchie whether he had brought the letter that had been received commending the Rev. Woolworth Van Cloud, of Westwood. On being informed he had, Mr. Moore borrowed it, and after reading it

through several times returned it to his companion and then, leaning back in his chair, closed his eyes in thought. Suddenly he roused himself and, taking a railroad timetable from his pocket, began to study it. Then he closed his eyes again and remained quiet for some moments.

Rising at an early hour the next morning, he hurriedly dressed himself and going to the window looked out. Nothing was to be seen but a long stretch of road, flanked by maple trees, with here and there a house nestling in the green. He had not remained at the window more than twenty minutes when he saw a carriage coming. It was evidently on its way to the railway station. As it passed the tavern, he noticed that there was only one person within, whom he soon recognized as the young preacher of the day before. The recognition seemed to afford him considerable satisfaction, for he smiled as he turned quickly away from the window and remarked to himself: "The early worm may catch the bird at his breakfast, but he's a fool of a worm if he stays where the



bird will see him." Then he went downstairs.

After breakfast he excused himself to his friends and walked to Mrs. Van Cloud's residence. When he reached the house, he knocked at the door, and in a few moments Emily made her appearance. Noticing that he showed surprise at seeing her, she laughed in a bright, cheery way, and after heartily wishing him "Good morning," asked if he had come to see her grandmother.

Entering, he explained that he had called early that he might have the pleasure of a brief visit with Mrs. Van Cloud, but did not wish to interrupt her at her breakfast, and that, if she were still at the table, he would wait. She led him to the parlor and, after calling the old lady, returned, seated herself near the window, and entered into conversation with him.

Her vivacious manner, dancing eyes, quick, intelligent thought, and almost audacious questions and remarks so embarrassed and enraptured him that he scarcely knew what he said, and considered



himself the stupidest kind of a man in conversation. At the same time he wished that Mrs. Van Cloud would delay her coming.

It was not long, however, before the old lady appeared. She was dressed in black with a snow-white cap on her head. The same gold-rimmed spectacles that she wore on the way from the station and at church were perched on her nose. When she entered the room Emily excused herself, and he drew his chair up near the old lady.

Straining his voice, he began at once to inquire after her health and then, by patient repetition, made her understand that he had come to inquire about her son who was preaching at Westwood. On hearing her son's name mentioned she smiled with evident gratification and began at once to give a detailed account of his childhood; how he had endured with patience the mumps, measles and scarlet fever; how he had narrowly escaped falling from a roof, being run over by a locomotive and being drowned in the canal;

how he had shown unusual brightness of mind in school, college and seminary; how now in her declining years he watched over her with affection and solicitude; how, since he entered the ministry, he had shown wonderful ability as a preacher, having called together a large congregation of devoted people who were affected to tears every time he preached; and how, notwithstanding his many virtues, she was not blind to the fact that he had the one fault of forgetfulness.

When Mr. Moore spoke of the pleasure that he and his friends anticipated in hearing her son preach, and made inquiry regarding the size of his church, she informed him that though the church was large, strong and very active, her son was anxious to change his field of labor on account of a complaint some of the people had made regarding his absentmindedness.

“He’s very sensitive and can’t stand criticism,” she declared, “and has asked some of his ministerial friends to use their influence in his behalf, and he’s so popular

that they've done it, and have sent his name to a number of vacant churches, so that there's no doubt but that before long he will go where he and his family will be more thoroughly appreciated."

Then he asked about Mr. Van Cloud's family, and was told that her son and his wife had three children, Emily and her two brothers, a boy ten years old, who was in school classes with boys of twelve and fifteen, and a baby boy two months old who was very precocious and sure to be a preacher on account of his dear winning ways and strong lungs.

Having received all this information, Mr. Moore adroitly inquired whether she and her granddaughter had been long acquainted with the Rev. Mr. Newhall, whereupon she told him that while she had only recently made his acquaintance she knew that he came from a good family, was unusually promising and withal was just such a person as she liked Emily to know.

This last remark did not altogether please her caller, for he twisted in his

chair and began more earnestly to ingratiate himself in the old lady's good opinion.

As he arose to go she detained him with the request that before leaving he would spend a few moments reading to her, which, though his voice was very husky from loud speaking, he promptly consented to do.

Leading him to a cozy little sitting-room, she handed him a copy of "Baxter's Saint's Rest." This he read until it seemed as though his throat would no longer permit him to speak; so he lowered his voice. This did not disturb the old lady in the least, for she kept on nodding her head in approval, and occasionally interrupted him by saying, "That's so. That's all true—true as the Gospel."

When he closed the book and was again about to leave, she handed him a copy of Village Hymns. He read several of the selections, which pleased her very much, for she kept up a low murmur as though trying to sing the tunes as in former years. Finally she handed him



the Bible and requested him to read a chapter. The book-mark, she said, would indicate where she had left off. The mark had evidently been misplaced, but realizing that she did not hear him he did as he was told and read the eighth chapter of First Chronicles, when he came to the twenty-fourth verse she interrupted him by saying. "How beautiful, oh how perfectly beautiful!"

At last he was able to take his leave, but not before he had received an invitation to call again and dine with Emily and herself. The invitation amply repaid him for all the discomfort of the morning, and he turned away with pleasant memories of his visit.

As he left the house he saw Emily in the garden and paused to speak to her, but conversation was almost impossible on account of his hoarseness. Yet he could listen, and her merry laugh rang in his mind long after he had reached his room.



## CHAPTER V

## THE BEACONHILL CONVENTION

MR. RITCHIE, having heard some one at the tavern say that there was to be a convention of ministers the next day at Beaconhill, communicated the fact to his companions and declared that, as Beaconhill was only twenty miles distant, the committee should attend and meet the delegates. He felt sure, he said, that it would be a good opportunity to see a number of clergymen and compare them with those that they had heard, and that it was possible Providence might cause them to there make the acquaintance of the right man for the Harksborough pastorate.

“It’s all nonsense to expect to find the right minister for our church at any clerical gathering,” returned Mr. Stickler. “Parsons don’t meet to preach, and what

we want is to hear preaching, but, as this place isn't any place to stay, and there are several days before Sunday, I won't be obstreperous. If you two men want to go to the convention I'll go along."

"This isn't any place to stay?" repeated Bently Moore in evident surprise. "Why, I think that it's just the loveliest spot on the universe. We couldn't find a more restful and quiet village in which to remain until Saturday. Besides, we're not wanted at the convention and have no business there."

As Mr. Ritchie and Mr. Stickler could see no reason for remaining where they were, Mr. Moore finally consented to go to Beaconhill on condition that, as he had an engagement to dine with Mrs. Van Cloud, he might be allowed to return on Thursday morning.

It was nearly noon when the three men reached Beaconhill. After making inquiries they found the church where the convention was held. A man was reading a report when they entered, so they took seats near the door and waited for

him to finish. After the reading, the report was discussed by several of the delegates. Then the pastor of the church gave notice that luncheon was ready and would be served in the basement, and that all who were present were cordially invited to remain.

A motion to adjourn was quickly followed by a general movement toward the stairs.

As the members of the committee felt it incumbent upon them to meet so many of the ministers as they could, they agreed that it would be advisable to accept the proffered hospitality of the pastor and take their luncheon at the church.

On the way down stairs, Mr. Ritchie, in search of information, put his hand familiarly on the shoulder of a stranger who happened to be walking by his side. The man turned, and seeing his companion's bright, cheery countenance, grasped his hand with both of his and shook it heartily.

"Glad to see you! Very glad to see you," he declared, "but you have the advantage of me, Doctor—, Doctor—"

"My name is Ritchie, Jonathan Ritchie, of Harksborough," he explained.

"And mine is Pattengill. P-a-t, Pat. The name of the gentleman from Dublin when he firsts lands. T-e-n, ten. The amount you and I look for when we marry the young folks, and g-i-l-l, gill. The appliance that fishes find useful for respiration. Ha! ha! ha! Guess you won't forget my name now, will you, Dr. Ritchie?"

"Forget it? Why, I couldn't forget it if I tried," returned Mr. Ritchie, as he joined the man in a hearty laugh. "And now, Mr. Pattengill," he continued, "I want to say that I consider it a special providence that I met you, for you no doubt know all the ministers here and can do me a great favor."

Mr. Pattengill dropped Mr. Ritchie's hand and repeated, "A great favor, eh?" and then drew back to take another look at him.

"You see," said Mr. Ritchie, "my friends here and I constitute a committee, delegated by the Harksborough Church to recommend a pastor to take the place



of Dr. Downey, who has left us, and we're looking around for the right man. We don't know any of the clergymen here and I'll esteem it a great favor if you will give me a few points regarding them. We want a first-class man, you understand—an all-round man. You know the kind I mean."

"Oh! ah!" returned Mr. Pattengill, as he again seized Mr. Ritchie's hand and shook it with renewed fervor. "You've come to just the right person. I'll put you on track at once, and consider it a pleasure. I'm what you call a board man and know the makeup of almost every minister in our denomination. B-o-a-r-d, board—a plank on which to walk, and m-a-n, man—a fellow whose business it is to walk it. See? Ha! ha! ha! Now there are a number of all-right men here, just the kind you ought to have. I'll introduce you to some of them after luncheon and you can interview them for yourself. I congratulate you, Mr. Ritchie, on coming to this convention and on making yourself known to me." Then



he inquired regarding the location of the Harksborough Church, the size of the parsonage, the salary that was paid, the number of enrolled members, the estimated value of the property, and the seating capacity of the auditorium.

Before the delegates took their seats at the long tables that had been spread for them, Mr. Pattengill was seen in earnest conversation with several ministers, while casting side glances at Mr. Ritchie and his friends. In a few moments Mr. Pattengill introduced the moderator of the convention to the three members of the Harksborough committee who invited them to seats with him at the head of the table.

During the meal the moderator and one or two others so directed the conversation with their guests that they informed themselves of the exact requirements of the Harksborough Church.

After luncheon Mr. Ritchie and his friends were presented to a rather pompous little man by the name of Smokam, who had a habit of lifting his shoulders

while talking. He gave them a lengthy account of his work in Willingford, and declared that while he did not usually approve of Christians forsaking their own places of worship, his evening congregations were largely made up of people from other churches who flocked to his services to hear his sermons.

Then another rather tall man by the name of Cogswell was introduced, who talked to them at some length on the importance of loyalty to one's own denomination.

Mr. Stickler was annoyed by the attentions that he received, and continually urged his companions to go outdoors with him and regale themselves with cigars, but Bently Moore seemed to enjoy talking with the ministers and laughed and joked familiarly with them, while he promptly complied with the request of several who desired their addresses recorded in his note-book.

Mr. Ritchie was delighted with the interest that so many seemed to take in the Harksborough Church, and showed

his appreciation by listening attentively to the reports and addresses that were made.

In the afternoon the Rev. Chauncey Freeshackle read a paper on the crying need of broad men in the American pulpit. The address had been carefully prepared, and the reader was evidently anxious that the Harksborough visitors should hear what he had to say, for he persistently glanced over to the place where they were sitting. Stimulated by the smiling countenance and approving nods of Mr. Ritchie, he became more earnest and shook his clenched hand at the congregation for emphasis and conviction. Happening to notice Mr. Stickler's unsympathetic face, long-drawn brows, set lips and wearied expression, he ceased using his fist and substituted a more rapid delivery. Turning again toward the three men, he observed that Mr. Moore was writing in his note-book, and thinking that the young committeeman was recording portions of his address, he observed him more closely and, when he saw the pencil in use, re-

peated his statements so as to give ample time for accurate inscription.

Had the Rev. Chauncey Freeshackle been able to see what was being written, he might have read Mr. Moore's own observations on the subject under consideration. They were as follows:

"Some broad-minded men are narrow in spots and some narrow-minded men are broad in spots.

"Men who boast of their broad-mindedness are generally not broad enough to regard with charity those whom they think are narrow.

"It is often very difficult to distinguish between a broad little man and a narrow big man.

"The best place to secure a broad outlook is from a narrow viewpoint.

"Looking through the small end of the telescope may give a broad vision and looking through the large end may give a narrow vision, but it doesn't make any difference with the size of the things that are seen.

"Paul was broad-minded when he



wanted to comprehend the breadth and length and depth and height of Christ's love, and he was narrow-minded when he said: 'This one thing I do: I press toward the mark.' I believe that the best men are both broad and narrow.

"People needn't tell me that all narrow-minded men are bigots and all broad-minded men are infidels. It's just as easy for a narrow-minded man to be an infidel and a broad-minded man a bigot as to be anything else.

"Some men are too ignorant to know why they are broad-minded or narrow-minded. It takes a wise man to be either one or the other and know the reason.

"I've noticed that there's a big difference between broad-mindedness and large-mindedness. Some small-minded men spread out their thinking in such thin layers that they look broad.

"The narrowest-minded man that I ever met was a fellow up our way who used to get mad because his next-door neighbor was so narrow. And the broadest-minded man that I ever met was that same neigh-



bor who thought that his ill-tempered critic was not in the least narrow.

“It’s strange, but it’s true, that narrow-minded men almost always brag about their breadth, and broad-minded men, if they are truly broad, keep still.”

That evening and during the next day, the committee listened to other papers, and to the discussion of other subjects, and were interviewed by other ministers.

On leaving, Mr. Ritchie declared that the committee had never done a wiser thing than to go to Beaconhill. That the privilege of becoming acquainted with so many intelligent Christian men and listening to them speak on important themes was enough to justify the visit. When it was considered that the committee had also received the names and addresses of several fine ministers who would, he was sure, more than meet all the requirements of the Harksborough Church, he felt it incumbent upon him to say that they had been directed by a divine Providence.

Mr. Stickler lifted his brows, drew his lips together, and waited for Bently

Moore to express his opinion; but as Moore seemed deep in thought, he turned to his companion and said:

“Well, Ritchie, I wish that I could squeeze nectar out of sawdust the way you can. ‘Intelligent Christian men’! I suppose so, but ‘important themes’! Perhaps they were to you and Moore, but I’ll be hanged if I could make out what they were all about. As to ‘names and addresses,’ I should think we had several of them. I’m beginning to believe that every minister is either just settled or looking for a place. I’ll leave it to you, Moore, if I’m not right.”

Bently Moore looked at his companions. Then slowly drawled out, as though he were speaking to himself:

“I think that I never learned so much in my life. Out of the fifty and more ministers, most of whom I met in one way or another, only three or four sought either directly or indirectly to get an opportunity to preach in Harksborough. I’ll venture to say the names that the other two members of the committee put in their

note-books are the same that I put in mine. I was beginning to think with Stickler that ministers were all divided into two classes, the 'just settled' and the 'want to be settled' when I went to that convention. There I found a large number of splendid men who seemed satisfied with working the best they knew how, leaving the field to God, and my respect for the ministry has as a result greatly increased. On the whole they were thoroughly in earnest and conscientious. In addition to the three or four names that were given to me, I have a few others that I sought myself. They were not the names of officious men who seemed to like to hear themselves talk and who took every opportunity that offered, to express their opinions, but the names of those who seemed to have some definite reason for speaking and had a spiritual purpose in what they said. I'm going to look into their work. Perhaps some one of them may meet our requirements. What puzzled me was how any well-meaning, sensible men like Freeshackle could get so worked up over nothing and keep

blowing as you might say through pipe-stems into soapy water the way he did, stirring up a perfect mountain of pretty bubbles, and how all the rest could sit still and see him do it. Now I propose that we go back to Vinton Village and think over what we've seen and heard. I've taken a severe cold, and do not want to expose myself to any more church draughts until next Sunday; besides, I have an invitation to take dinner with Mrs. Van Cloud."

The three men boarded a train and were soon speeding on their way back to Vinton Village. When the cars stopped at Harringsford, Mr. Moore noticed the entrance of Rev. Mr. Newhall and at once engaged his two friends in earnest conversation, so that neither of them observed the young minister's presence.

## CHAPTER VI

## THE LITTLE POSTMAN

THE next day when Bently Moore drew near Mrs. Van Cloud's residence he saw two people strolling under the trees a short distance from the house. As he drew nearer he observed that the man was Rev. Mr. Newhall, and that the pink sun-bonnet close to the man's shoulder shaded Emily's laughing face.

A scowl darkened his countenance for an instant; but it was quickly followed by a smile and he passed through the gate and ascended the front steps. A maid responded to his knock and he was ushered into the parlor. As the blinds had been closed and the shades drawn, the room was dark and cool. Coming out of the bright light, it was some moments before he could see the furniture, but he managed to find a chair near the window and seated himself.



By the time Mrs. Van Cloud entered he had become accustomed to the darkness and, although he could not entirely shake off his annoyance at seeing Mr. Newhall, he arose to meet the old lady as she advanced to welcome him.

After inquiring about her health, he gave her a rather lengthy account of the convention at Beaconhill, and dwelt particularly on such matters as he thought would be of special interest to her. Then he asked whether it would be agreeable for him to call again the next day and read to her.

The old lady's eyes sparkled with delight at the request, and she assured him that nothing would give her greater pleasure than to have him come, but inquired whether he could not also spare some time that very day.

"I am sorry," he said, "but the truth is, I have a severe cold and my throat is in bad condition." Then he added: "If you would like to listen to reading to-day I have no doubt that the Rev. Mr. Newhall would esteem it a privilege to gratify

you. He is an excellent reader, as you very well know—”

“But he isn’t here yet,” she broke in, “and we’ve been expecting him for this last half hour.”

“I think that you are mistaken,” he replied. “He came somewhat earlier than I did, and is in the garden with Miss Emily—”

“Hey! hey! what’s that?” she exclaimed, putting her hand to her ear. “Say that again. You tell me that he’s here, that he came before you, and that he went off with my granddaughter before paying his respects to me? You must be wrong. Mr. Newhall is a gentleman.”

At that moment the maid appeared in the open doorway and announced dinner.

When the minister entered with Emily, the old lady welcomed him with glacial politeness and, looking keenly at him over the rims of her spectacles, asked whether he had just come.

The young man was somewhat embarrassed at the question, and glanced at

Emily. Then, assuming an air of confidence, he assured her that he had reached the house a short time before, but had remained outside for a moment to speak to her granddaughter.

She said no more, but fixed her eyes sharply on him and then looked at the young girl, who was gazing at the minister with a serious but puzzled expression, quite unusual to her.

During the dinner Mr. Newhall devoted himself almost entirely to Emily, and Bently Moore sought in every way he could to ingratiate himself in the good opinion of Mrs. Van Cloud.

On rising from the table the old lady told Mr. Newhall that it would be a gratification if he would spend a little time reading to her. Though manifestly annoyed by the request, he expressed his willingness to comply with her wishes and followed her into the sitting-room, while Mr. Moore and Emily went out under the trees.

Taking no interest in the book that was handed to him, he read along monoto-

nously and twisted in his chair, impatiently waiting for his release.

She observed his restless movements, and held him more persistently to his task, manifesting a keen interest in every page that he read.

As Bently Moore and Emily drew near the hedge that separated the Van Cloud premises from that adjoining, they observed a young woman on the other side of the hedge playing with her five-year-old boy. Emily went forward at once and spoke a few pleasant words to her neighbor and the child, and then returning to her companion, led him through the orchard to a clump of trees near the house.

Seating themselves under the branches of a widespreading maple, they talked for half an hour.

“Yes, I know all about ministers and a good deal about churches,” she declared, as Moore tried to give her a description of some man whom he met at the Beaconhill convention. “You see, I belong to a minister’s family, and while I know that there are a few spider spinning, long-winded and



nagging preachers, as you say there are a good many more who, though they might not be able to stand cartooning, are as good and true as can be. People that look for crooked sticks are sure to find them even though the yard is full of straight ones. I don't want to say that you are that way, for you just said that most ministers were doing splendid work, but there are a great many people who forget that there are fussy and fossilized churches where a man couldn't do a good work if he tried." And her merry laugh rang out through the tree branches.

"I'd take you for a preacher any day," he replied, "and be satisfied to sit under your sermons every Sunday. I think you must inherit the ability to interest and instruct others. No danger of your working a hobby to death or theorizing a congregation to sleep."

She laughed again and pushed a stray lock of hair back from her forehead; then she threw a bunch of clover blossoms at him and retorted:

"So you think that while I am not no-



tional or speculative, I might have the gift of continuance and might nag a congregation if I tried?"

"No, I didn't say so," he retorted, "but if you'll be my pastor I'll promise to let you preach as long sermons as you like and nag me all you please. I think I'd like it."

Just at that moment the child that they had seen in the next yard pushed through the hedge and came running to them with a slip of paper in his hand.

"Well, Frankie, what have you brought me?" she asked, as she took the paper from him.

"Me an' mamma's playin' poch-office," he answered.

"So this is a letter that my little postman has brought me," she remarked, as she unfolded the missive and read: "Frankie and I are having a great time. I'm Uncle Sam and he's my postal deliverer, and I send you this as your part in the game."

Tearing off a portion of the paper and borrowing a pencil from her companion,

she wrote: "Your dear little carrier brought the mail safely and delivered it with a bright face. He will be always welcome."

The child was off in an instant, and before many moments had elapsed was back again with tousled hair, panting breath and a merry countenance. This time he had a letter for Mr. Moore, which was duly answered.

They saw the child running to rocks and stones, trees and stumps, delivering and receiving imaginary mail, but the human interest being lacking, the boy became wearied and begged:

"Mamma, me want to take letter to Grandma Van Cloud."

The mother readily complied with the child's request and wrote on a piece of paper:

"This little missive is sent to ask Grandma Van Cloud to give the bearer one of her bright smiles and sweet kisses."

Just as the child ran across the lawn toward the house with his letter, Mr. Newhall came out and started toward the

grove where Moore and Emily were seated.

Wearied with his play and anxious to return to his mother, the boy met the young clergyman and, with the familiarity that belongs to childhood, thrust the note into the man's hand with the request:

"Mister, I's tired pla'ing poch-man. Won't you please give this to Grandma Van Cloud for me?"

Mr. Newhall was on the point of refusing when he noticed the child's pleading face, and feared that non-compliance might be followed by a loud howl of disappointment. He could see that Moore and Emily were both looking at him, so he quickly took the letter and turned back.

Mrs. Van Cloud had been considerably agitated in her mind over the young clergyman's behavior, and had with difficulty kept from openly rebuking him for his conduct. She was not therefore in any condition to palliate further offenses.

Receiving the note that the young man handed to her with explanation that she did not hear, she adjusted her spectacles

and, after glancing over them at him, read what had been written.

In a moment her eyes flashed in anger and, trembling with excitement, she rose from her chair and exclaimed: "Hey! hey! what you say? You give me this?"

The old lady's temper was so great and her hearing so difficult that he made up his mind to proffer no further explanations and was about to turn on his heel and leave when he thought that the contents of the note might in some way compromise him, so he bit his lips and, while the blood mounted to his face, he stood his ground and tried to make her understand that he was only acting in behalf of the child.

"The little boy out there on the lawn," he said, "asked me to bring it to you and I did so to please him."

"Hey! hey! What's that?" she exclaimed, without understanding a word that he had said. "No, I won't. An old woman like me. You snipper-snapper! you snipper-snapper! In my own house, too."

He tried to speak again, but hesitated



in his efforts to command himself, and she repeated in great excitement:

“You snipper-snapper! you snipper-snapper!”

Raising his voice he made another effort. “The little boy out there with Mr. Moore and Miss Emily—”

“Emily! Emily!” she broke in, “and you meant to give this to Emily, did you? You tell me to my face that you meant to give this to Emily? You snipper-snapper! I won’t have such goings-on. No, I won’t. She’s my granddaughter, and as long as she’s under my roof she’s under my protection. You go home, and don’t you ever set your foot in my house again, you snipper-snapper! You write such a note as this! It’s outrageous, simply outrageous. Now go!”

He tried to explain again, but the old lady’s excitement and deafness made it impossible, and he was about to turn away when Mr. Moore and Emily, hearing their voices, hurried to the house.

When Mrs. Van Cloud handed her granddaughter the note and declared that



Mr. Newhall had intended it for her, the young girl's face blushed scarlet, and she seemed uncertain whether to laugh or be indignant. Quickly recovering herself, she tore the paper in pieces and, without looking at the young minister, explained Frankie's play and was soon able to quiet her grandmother.

When Mrs. Van Cloud thoroughly understood the matter she offered the young man a formal apology and, in order to make amends for her unjust accusations, extended another invitation for him to come and dine.

Soon after the two young men took their leave. Mr. Newhall never accepted the invitation, but Bently Moore called the next day and spent an hour reading to the old lady.

## CHAPTER VII

## TAGGING MINISTERS

THE bustling city of Westwood was situated about fifty miles north of Vinton Village, but the railway connections were so poor, that it generally took a full half day to reach the place.

As the three men stepped from the cars and entered the waiting-room at Chanictown Junction to await the train that would take them to their destination, they found that it was full of travelers, men, women and children. As the air was close, and as it would be a considerable time before they could proceed on their journey, they left their baggage at the news-stand and went out for a walk.

The railway shops and round-houses being located at the place, most of the men living there were employed by the road.

The streets were narrow and dirty, the

houses plain and dingy, and the churches small and unattractive. Mr. Ritchie and his friends determined to go to the outskirts of the town, where they hoped to find some cool retreat. Following the main street they came upon an old stage road. After pursuing their way for a short distance, they climbed a fence and sought the shade of some trees.

"I tell you, gentlemen," said Mr. Stickler as he picked up some small stones and flung them into a brook twenty feet distant, "I'm getting tired of this whole business. Here we've been on the go, goodness knows how long, and heard a few ministers and met a lot more, and we haven't found one that will fill the bill. And what's more, there doesn't seem to be any prospect of our finding any that are at all suitable for our church. If it's hard for a clergyman to get a pulpit, as they say it is, it's a mighty sight harder for a pulpit to get a clergyman of the right sort."

"Nonsense, nonsense!" replied Mr. Ritchie. "You can't find any one because

you and Moore here are too finical. I could pick five or six among those that we have met who would be entirely satisfactory. Why, it's as easy to get a minister as it is to close your eyes when you're sleepy."

"Well, there's one thing that's certain," remarked Mr. Moore. "If we haven't hit on the right person we've hit on a lot of experiences, and that's considerable. A man isn't any less human because he's set apart to preach. He'll have his personal characteristics, agreeable and disagreeable, after he's ordained just the same as before. I'm not speaking anything against the profession when I say that ministers are all tagged and labeled just as we are. Now there was Soarer. I call him Fly-away—he gave himself that name. And there was Freeshackle; I call him Sir Chauncey Smirk on account of the way he had of keeping his face screwed up into a perpetual smile. And there was Newhall; I call him Natty Bandbox, because he was so stiff in the pulpit and so spick and span about his clothing. And there

was that fellow with sandy hair that we met at Beaconhill; I call him the Blank Cartridge, because he was so explosive in his speech and said so little. And there was Pattengill; I call him the spellbinder on account of his fondness for spelling out words. And there was that little man that took every opportunity that he could to get up and say something at the convention; I call him the Drum Major, because of his size and manner. And there was Sleighman or Slightman, or something of that sort; the tall fellow that wanted us to promise him a hearing in our church, and that told us about the Board men and Doctors of Divinity that would recommend him. I call him Tuft Hunter. And there was Parson Aeronaut, and the Reverend Cambric Tea, and Dominie Patchworker, and Pastor Prattler, and a lot of others whom it would be easy enough to tag. If it hasn't been valuable experience for us to meet all these men and read their labels, then I don't know what experience is."

"Moore, you're a croaker!" put in Mr.



Ritchie, "you can't see any good in any one. The ministers are not labeled at all except in your imagination. They are all first-class men, and most of them are plenty good enough for Harksborough."

"Perhaps they're too good," returned Mr. Moore. But it's not my imagination that labels them, it's their gifts or peculiarities or something else. If you and I were ministers we'd be labeled too; perhaps we are, anyway. You just called me a croaker. The trouble is, not that ministers are inefficient and have peculiarities, but that they are so often misplaced. An organizer, for example, gets into a church that is already organized and his natural proclivities lead him to overdo the matter, and he introduces more machinery than the people can run. A parish worker assumes a charge that demands strong preaching, and a man of marked pulpit ability goes where house to house visiting is more greatly needed. A story-teller tries to help people of argumentative minds, and a financier seeks to control the temporal affairs of an organization that

is already well managed. A socializer dances attendance to a lot of clodhoppers, and a rustic thinks that he can minister to gentlefolk. You cannot expect any one man can have every grace and talent and suit every church alike. All that you can expect is that a minister should be an honest, intelligent, spiritually-minded man, and adapted to the most pronounced need of the church to which he is called."

"Well, they needn't all try to make out that they're great," declared Mr. Stickler, "because they're not."

"There I think you're wrong again," returned Mr. Moore. "Every minister is great, or ought to be, along some particular line of service, but it need not prevent his trying to be faithful along other lines. I don't object to a man cultivating his talents. What I object to is his cultivating hobbies and calling them talents, and belittling the real talents of others. When one minister talks about the big horn he blows and another talks about the sweet-toned piccolo he plays, as though there were no other instruments in the orchestra,

it makes me cross. I don't like to judge motives, but it seems to me that the Director up there is the one to say which is most important," and Bently Moore pointed up at the blue sky gleaming through the branches.

"Yes, and I notice that the man with the horn and the piccolo will think more of their pay than their music," persisted Mr. Stickler. "The first question they ask is, 'How much salary does your church give?' "

"Well," said Mr. Ritchie, "I suppose that salary means as much to them as to others. I know I wouldn't stand the criticism they get and do the work they do for double the money that most of them receive. If churches want to pull and haul their ministers around, and talk about them the way they do, they ought to pay well for the privilege."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Mr. Moore. "There you're touching a tender spot, as we ourselves haven't been doing much else than criticise ministers. But I agree with you that churches ought to pay their pastors

good, fair salaries and then stand by them. I don't much believe in the theory of so much pay, so much preach; it's too much the theory of the slot machine. Every workman ought to be generously compensated for his services, but he ought not to give his services merely for compensation. There's the biggest kind of a difference between pay for work and work for pay."

"Tweedledee and tweedledum," returned Mr. Stickler. "I suppose Van Cloud will come next on your list to label."

"I hope that he will be the right man," Mr. Moore replied. "His old mother told me that his only fault was absent-mindedness. I am sure that I should not object to that if she means heavenly mindedness. What I want is a prophet and not an essayist."

"One thing I want to speak about. It has occurred to me that it's hardly fair to ministers when we hear them only once and then judge them on the basis of that one sermon. There may be a hundred contingencies that would make a fine preacher deliver an occasionally poor ser-



mon; besides, the best sermons are always to be continued in our next. So I move that we hear Van Cloud at least three or four times if he seems at all desirable——”

“No time for that,” interrupted Mr. Stickler; “we’ve hardly time to hear him once. I’m most ready to give up this committee job now, and let Harksborough Church call whom it pleases. This tramping around the country and accomplishing nothing isn’t to my liking.”

The other two laughed in reply, and, watches being consulted, it was found that their train was scheduled to start in fifteen minutes.

“Come, we’ll have to hurry,” Mr. Moore called out as he rose to his feet. “And hereafter let us look for a man rather than a minister. I reckon that he’ll be harder to find.”



## CHAPTER VIII

## TWO MEN AND A BABY

ON reaching the railway station they found that the train was a full half hour behind time, and they took seats in the waiting-room and tried to pass the time as comfortably as they could.

Mr. Stickler and Mr. Moore continued their conversation regarding churches and ministers, while Mr. Ritchie watched the restless people about him with boyish interest and amusement.

"If there's any one that I abominate," said Mr. Stickler, striking his knee for emphasis, "it's a ramrod preacher, a man who is always trying to crowd his theories and notions down my throat."

"And if there is any that I abominate," returned Mr. Moore, "it's the preacher that gives me the chance to dodge. When a man hasn't fire enough in his sermon to send conviction to my heart straight and

quick, I draw down my shoulders and let the charge go over me—”

Mr. Moore had no sooner uttered the words when Mr. Ritchie thrust his elbow into his side. He had been watching a young man on the other side of the room, who was ineffectually trying to quiet a crying baby who was squirming and making vigorous efforts to get from his lap to the floor.

“I say, Stickler—Moore,” said Mr. Ritchie, with suppressed excitement, “that fellow over there has got himself in a heap of trouble.”

“How? Where?” they both asked together.

“Why, just as we came in here,” he answered, “I saw a tall, black-eyed woman go up to him and ask him to hold her baby for her. I thought at the time that she was putting up a game on him and kept my eyes open. The baby was fast asleep and the fellow was innocent enough to fall right into the trap. For the last ten minutes he’s been looking all around for her, but she’s evidently made good her escape.

One has to be mighty careful about accommodating strangers."

"You don't say so," returned Mr. Stickler. "Well, that's what comes of letting one's self be imposed upon. Ritchie, you'd have done the same thing. You're always asking the privilege of being some one's pack-horse. I hope now you've learned a lesson."

"He's evidently a stranger in these parts and don't know what to do," said Mr. Ritchie, totally ignoring his companion's reproof. "He's anxious and worried. I believe I'll go over and speak to him. There's a station-house up the street. You remember we passed it coming down. He might explain his situation and leave the child there. Poor fellow!"

Having thus spoken he went over to where the young man was struggling with the infant, and with a benign smile said:

"I'm very sorry for you, sir. I saw from where I was sitting that your good nature had been sadly imposed upon, and I thought that I'd just come and offer my sympathies and assistance."

The young man looked at him for an instant, and then, without paying any further attention to his offer, began to shake a bunch of keys in front of the child.

"I don't want to destroy your confidence in human nature," continued Mr. Ritchie, "but I'm afraid that the woman who gave you the child will never return to relieve you."

"She'll come back all right," the man asserted, without looking up.

"No, she won't," Mr. Ritchie insisted. "She intends to get rid of her offspring and saddle it on you. Now I'm an older man than you are and have had considerable experience in the world. Let me give you a little advice and possible help."

"You can't do anything," was the man's laconic answer, as he turned his face to avoid a blow from the baby's open hand.

"Perhaps not, perhaps not, but then I can try, you know," and he removed his spectacles and wiped them with his handkerchief in anticipation of the pleasure that he was to have in rendering assistance. "You see, I've been walking about town



a little with my friends. We passed a station-house not far from here. The idea came to me as I sat over there watching you, that possibly you didn't know there was such a place near, and I said to myself, 'Well, now, I'll just go over to the station-house with that young man and the baby and try and induce the police sergeant to take the child off his hands.' I've no doubt but that he'd do it. There must be a foundling asylum near here where the little one could be properly cared for."

"What do you mean, sir?" returned the man as he deposited the infant on the floor and rose to face Mr. Ritchie. His cheeks were aflame and his eyes flashed as he shook his fist close to that gentleman's nose. "What do you mean, sir, by insinuating that I should hand my baby over to the police and have it put in a foundling asylum. Do you mean to insult me?"

"Not at all, not at all," Mr. Ritchie returned, as it dawned upon him that he had made a mistake. "I beg your pardon. I supposed that the woman who left the



baby in your arms was an impostor. That was all."

"An impostor, an impostor? My wife an impostor? You scoundrel! How dare you?" he screamed, as he shook his fist again in Mr. Ritchie's face. Then he grabbed him by the collar and would have given him a severe handling had not his words and action started an uproar in the waiting-room. Women hurried to the door, pulling their children after them, and men leaped forward to separate the two men.

"Hands off!" shouted one. "Let him alone!" said another. "What's the matter?" inquired a third. "Call the police!" demanded a fourth.

"Here! here!" Mr. Moore interposed, as he wedged his way through the crowd and tried to pull the young man back. "I know that gentleman, and he's all right."

"He isn't a gentleman! He isn't all right," was the man's angry retort. "I won't let any man insult me. He came over here, and, because the baby was crying, said that he'd take us both over to the

station-house and have my child put in a foundling asylum. I resented his impudence and he called my wife an impostor. 'The scoundrel!'" Then he made another dash at Mr. Ritchie's throat, but was held back.

"Let me explain," said Mr. Ritchie. "Let me just explain," but before he could do so a policeman whom some one had called entered, and Mr. Ritchie and the young man were led to the station-house.

Mr. Stickler and Mr. Moore followed close beside them, and a crowd of loungers and street urchins thronged about the party until they reached the police headquarters and were taken inside.

Standing before the sergeant's desk, Mr. Ritchie made his explanation, which was confirmed by his companions and accepted by the young man. Then they were all discharged and returned to the waiting-room.

On their way back they were met by the young man's wife, who, hearing of her husband's arrest, was hurrying in great excitement to the station-house.

Delayed by the necessity of repeated explanations and quieting assurances, they reached the railroad too late for the train. Whereupon Mr. Ritchie invited the young man and his wife to take luncheon with him, and they all went to a small restaurant and, after spending a half hour at the table, separated in good spirits.

As Mr. Ritchie shook hands in parting with his new-made friends, he slipped a dollar bill in the baby's fist and smilingly assured them all of his best wishes.

"Fine young people," he remarked to his companions; "very promising infant. Embarrassing incident, but it all worked out for the best."

On reaching Westwood late that afternoon, they went at once to the leading hotel. During that night it rained quite hard, so that the next morning they found the walks wet and the crossings muddy. But the sun was shining and the sky gave promise of clear weather.

On entering the Rev. Woolworth Van Cloud's church they were agreeably impressed by the neatness and cleanliness of

the room, the quiet dress and reverent demeanor of the congregation, and the courtesy of the ushers.

No sooner were they comfortably seated well toward the front of the room than Mr. Ritchie noticed an offensive odor, as of escaping gas, but said nothing about it to his companions.

Soon the organ began to play, and the Rev. Mr. Van Cloud stepped out on the platform accompanied by a stranger of portly build, with a bald head and solemn face.

Mr. Stickler leaned over to Bently Moore and said: "I am afraid that Mr. Van Cloud isn't going to preach!"

A shadow of disappointment passed over Mr. Moore's face as he returned in a low voice: "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things."

Mr. Stickler was evidently puzzled by the words, for he looked at him inquiringly. Then he turned his eyes toward the pulpit and observed that Mr. Van Cloud had forgotten to remove a large pair



of arctic overshoes which he had worn to the church.

The opening services being over, the pastor announced a praise meeting to take the place of the regular evening service, and a lawn-party supper and sale of fancy articles by the ladies of the church on Wednesday evening. Then he introduced the Rev. Dr. Skane, who, he said, was an old friend and who would preach that morning. The stout man with the bald head and solemn face stepped forward, placed a manuscript on the open Bible, cleared his throat, announced his text, and proceeded to preach in a dull, lifeless way. He had drawled along for three-quarters of an hour when Mr. Van Cloud observed the listlessness of the people and an unusual movement of their faces, as if annoyed by some odor. In a moment he caught the smell of gas that Mr. Ritchie had noticed on entering. Rising, he put his hand on the preacher's shoulder and said:

"I beg your pardon, Dr. Skane, for interrupting, but I notice that there is con-



siderable waste of gas that is annoying to the congregation. I should be pleased if the sexton would open the ventilators." Then he sat down.

The people smiled. Dr. Skane turned red in the face, and, hurrying over the remaining pages of his manuscript, took his seat.

Bently Moore opened the memorandum-book and wrote: "Every sermon has its good points and is useful in one of two ways: either to kindle a flame of devotion and purpose in the human heart, or to kindle a flame of fire in the kitchen stove. This morning we heard a Dr. Skane, who did not put a blaze in his sermon and should therefore have put his sermon in a blaze."

At the close of the service the committee remained to introduce themselves to Mr. Van Cloud, who, when he knew of their errand, was greatly disappointed at having a stranger in the pulpit. As there was to be a praise meeting in the evening, he urged them to remain over for another Sunday.

Mr. Moore, knowing that Miss Emily was expected to return home on Tuesday, was insistent on the committee's extending its stay until the following week, to which both Mr. Ritchie and Mr. Stickler agreed.

## CHAPTER IX

## A POPULAR PREACHER AND A LAWN PARTY

"I PROPOSE," said Bently Moore, as he leaned over the dining-table in the act of helping himself to a fresh supply of potatoes, "that we do not go to the praise meeting this evening. Mr. Van Cloud doesn't preach. It would be better to visit some other church and listen to a sermon. By embracing every opportunity that we have of hearing ministers, we may stumble on the right man."

"I think myself that it would be wise to hear as many sermons as we can," returned Mr. Ritchie, "but as we are, in a sense, on the Lord's business, it seems to me that 'stumble' is not just the right word to use. It would be better to say that, by entering every door that Providence opens, we may be led to discover the right man—"

"Well, I don't see as it makes much dif-

ference what you call it," broke in Mr. Stickler, "as long as we find the right man. So I propose that we go to the Market Street Church and hear the Rev. Cecil Kitlet Dingley, and be prepared to 'stumble' or be 'led,' as it may happen. The clerk in the office told me this morning that Dingley was the most popular preacher in town—an all-round, up-to-date man who catches the crowds. He's going to preach this evening on 'The Sublimities of Celestial Life,' whatever that may be. It is, however, a taking subject and I, for one, would like to hear what he has to say about it."

On entering the Market Street Church a few moments before the opening of the service, Mr. Ritchie and his friends were met in the vestibule by an affable young man with a pink flower in his buttonhole. He shook hands enthusiastically with each of them and, although he had never met them before, he told them of the great pleasure he felt in meeting them at that particular time. Then he passed them through the door with a celerity that

showed considerable practice. Every pew was filled, but before they had time to wonder whether they would find a seat another affable young man with a white waistcoat and patent-leather shoes greeted them very cordially, and presented them with printed copies of the weekly calendar, containing the hymns that were to be used in the service, a picture of the pastor and a few church announcements, then he passed them along to another affable young man with a diminutive mustache and a pair of large eyeglasses, who, after receiving them with many smiles, led them down the aisle to camp-chairs near the pulpit.

Having successfully retained a pleased expression throughout the ordeal of reception, and having endured with equanimity the pressure of several hand-grasps, they deposited their hats under their chairs, rubbed their aching fingers, relaxed their facial muscles and looked around.

The congregation was composed for the most part of young people and strangers. On the platform, which was broad and



deep, there was a large choir of whispering men and maidens.

Soon the organ began to play, and the Rev. Cecil Kitlet Dingley entered from an adjoining room. As there was no desk to obstruct the view, the minister was the center of observation. His iron-gray hair, that fell almost to the collar of his lustrous black frock coat, his deep-set, beady eyes that glanced from one side of the room to the other in evident pleasure, and his pale face, that was rendered more striking by his high cheek-bones and heavy eyebrows, were evidently objects of universal admiration, for there was an expression of satisfaction and expectancy on the faces of almost every one in the congregation when he made his appearance.

The opening services being concluded, the minister stepped forward and, after silently viewing the audience for a few moments, announced in a deep rasping voice that his text would be found in the sixty-fourth chapter of Isaiah and the fourth verse. Then he flung out his arms and said: "Brethren, this terrestrial sphere on

which we live and move and have our being is studded with sublimities unseen by mortal vision."

Having made this profound observation, he paused to allow time for the people to consider its full significance. Then he referred to some microscopic discoveries and declared that men in coming time would make other discoveries that would astonish the world, and that while there were myriads of terrestrial substances wrapped in eternal mystery, there were far more sublime substances within the celestial spheres, some of which were to be revealed through revelation and others through resurrection. Then he described a number of death-bed scenes in which departing saints had seen heavenly visions and heard angelic voices; and told of experiences that had come in past ages to the old mystics, opening to them, as it were, the very door of heaven.

After consuming some forty minutes in narrating with considerable dramatic power a number of unauthentic, but pathetic stories, and securing from his audience a copious discharge of tears, he

threw back his hair, mopped his brow, and called on the people to bow their heads in prayer.

Then he gave the Lord some information regarding Paradise and the occupation of redeemed saints, which excited more tears from his congregation.

Having uttered an Amen, he took his seat and four showily-dressed young people in the choir arose and, after looking at each other out of the corners of their eyes, sang about the angels.

When the service closed, the affable young men who met Mr. Ritchie and his friends when they entered took them by the hand again and invited them to come on the following Sunday.

Mr. Ritchie had listened to the sermon with great attention, and had rendered his handkerchief quite limp by the frequency with which he applied it to his eyes, and he could only express his admiration for the discourse by solemnly shaking his head and repeating to his companions, "Wonderful! wonderful; simply wonderful!"

"Yes, I know it," returned Bently

Moore. "It was truly a wonderful sermon. I think it was one of the most wonderful addresses that I have ever heard; but what seemed to me the greatest wonder, was the fact that so many people felt inclined to go and hear it."

The next day, when alone with Mr. Stickler, he turned to him and said, "Stickler, that sermon we heard last evening was 'most as wonderful a production as the soup that we had for dinner."

"What do you mean?" Mr. Stickler asked.

"Perhaps not quite so thin and spicy," he explained, "but chicken? Oh, yes, in the sense that a plucked fowl may have run through it on stilts. I think I'll tag Dingley 'Broth.' Don't you think that would be appropriate?"

"He said that his sermon was based on Isaiah sixty-four, four," observed Mr. Stickler, "but it didn't seem to me that there was a very close connection."

"He meant 'basted,' my good friend, only basted," returned Mr. Moore; "big



stitches, Coats' spool cotton number two hundred."

As the week was hanging heavily on the hands of the committee, it was agreed that it would be not only a diversion, but an opportunity to meet the Rev. Mr. Van Cloud and his people socially, if they attended the lawn-party and fair that had been announced the previous Sabbath morning.

So, at the appointed hour, the three men went to the place that had been designated and, after paying their admission to the grounds, found themselves surrounded by the innumerable lights that came from Japanese lanterns swung from tree-branches and suspended lines.

As they proceeded up the gravel walk toward a large house that was illuminated in every window, they were met by some pretty young women in fancy costumes, decorated with little blue ribbons that bore the inscription, "Reception Committee." The young women introduced themselves in a pleasing way and offered to conduct the newcomers about the grounds and



show them all the sales-booths and attractive places.

As the manners of the young women were exceedingly agreeable and their smiles extremely fascinating, it was almost impossible for Mr. Ritchie and his friends to refuse the assistance that had been proffered, and they suffered themselves to be led away.

As they walked along, the young women pointed out a number of tents on which placards were posted. One was marked, "Gypsy Encampment: Grab-bag with trade privilege, five cents." Another was marked, "Fish-pond, five cents a line." Another was marked, "Plum-tree, ten cents a shake; every plum has a pit." Another was marked, "Jack Horner, try your luck with the pie, five cents."

The members of the reception committee were so solicitous about the enjoyment of the men that they induced them to visit several of the tents, where they were surrounded by other pretty young women in costumes appropriate to their employment, who explained the mysteries and

opportunities of the schemes over which they presided, which resulted in the investment of a number of dimes and nickels and the possession of some wooden toys and useless trinkets.

On reaching the large house that stood far back from the gate, the men found the porch filled with tables where supper was being served by other young women in white lawn and pink.

"I'll tell you, Stickler!" said Mr. Ritchie, "this is the sort of thing that gives life to a church and draws the young people. We ought to have some such affair in our church at home every year, and Van Cloud's the man to stir us up to our duty."

Mr. Stickler had just at that moment discovered a room inside, over the door of which was a card bearing the inscription, "Art Gallery." Without answering his companion he made a dash for the place, and, after paying for admission, gazed around. Seeing nothing but an array of crude drawings and household scraps grotesquely labeled with dignified titles, he quickly left by another door and fled to a

seat under a tree at the further end of the yard, where he could quietly watch the festive scene at a distance.

When Bently Moore came near the porch he noticed Emily, who was acting as one of the waitresses, and, as no one was at her table, he left his companions, went over to where she was, and engaged her in conversation.

Mr. Ritchie laughed and joked and kept up such a run of joviality with everyone that he was continually surrounded by a merry crowd that watched his every movement and joined in all his mirth-giving experiences. His cheeks glowed with unusual warmth and his spectacles were so frequently dimmed with the tears of laughter that he wiped them every few moments. Excited and pleased, his generous impulses expressed themselves in making purchases from every sales-booth and taking chances in every raffle and polling-place. By the time he was ready for supper, all the buttonholes in his coat were decorated with small bouquets and all the pockets in his clothing bulged with newly

purchased possessions of one kind and another—penwipers, match-scratchers, candy, kitchen-aprons, dust-caps, flatiron-holders, handkerchiefs, women's collars, work-bags, dolls, and all the folds in his coat were drawn out of shape by the weight of his belongings. Three large cakes and two sofa-pillows, beside several other things, had been set aside for him. He had visited the art gallery three times, once to find Mr. Stickler and twice to laugh at the comical combinations. Several times he drew Mr. Moore away from the porch that he might show him some new wonder or ask his advice about the purchase of something that struck his fancy. At last, failing to secure Mr. Moore's continued interest, he gathered the children about him and led them from the fishing pool to the cobweb tent and then to the peanut stand, and then to the lemonade table, treating them wherever he went, until several of the mothers, seeing that their boys and girls were in danger of overeating, rescued them from their generous guide. In response to the sollicita-



tions of a young woman, he had his fortune told twice, and on being informed in the first instance that he was to marry a blonde maiden when he was fifty years of age, and, in the second, that he was to court and win a brunette at the age of forty-nine, he laughed heartily and declared that, inasmuch as he had already passed his sixtieth birthday and had the best wife in the world at home, who was neither blonde nor brunette, he must have his fortune told the third time to find out the real truth. The fortune-teller, being informed of her previous mistakes, gave him a correct statement of the happiness that he might expect, which sent him again to Mr. Moore to narrate the story of his prospects. Then he hunted up Mr. Stickler, and the three men seated themselves at Emily Van Cloud's table and ordered supper.

No sooner had they finished eating than Mr. Stickler and Mr. Moore returned to their hotel, but Mr. Ritchie remained to enjoy himself to the very close of the entertainment.



## CHAPTER X

## TWENTY-FIVE HUNDRED MOSQUITOES

THE regular weekly prayer-meeting of the church was held on the next evening but the people were so wearied that few were present. Mr. Ritchie and Mr. Stickler declared that they were too tired to go, and so spent the evening smoking and chatting, but Bently Moore attended the service and was rewarded by seeing Emily, who played the cabinet organ. At the close of the meeting she accepted his proffered escort and walked with him to her home.

“What did you think of the lawn party?” was almost her first question when they were beyond the hearing of others.

“It was a pleasant gathering, and I enjoyed the supper very much,” was his reply.

“Then you did not approve of everything?” she asked. “Don’t be afraid to

confess, for I am perfectly willing to say that, had not father been the minister, I should have had nothing to do with it."

"Well, then, since you want to know my real opinion of such things," he replied, "I'll just say that I do not believe churches can lift themselves up by their bootstraps."

She laughed at his answer and then remarked that she had never heard of lawn parties and church fairs being called bootstraps before, and asked whether he thought that they were as essential to religious organizations as straps were to the old-fashioned boots.

"Your question, to my mind, puts the matter in its true light," he returned. "Something of the sort, eliminating the bad features, of course, seems justifiable in most churches for the sake of fellowship and sociability; perhaps also for money, but I don't know about that; I haven't made up my mind, conditions differ so much. When kept within reasonable limits, they are certainly helpful in many respects. But when barter schemes are re-

garded as essential to Christian service, and are depended upon by the people for the church's financial support, then they become not only a burden, but quench the generous impulses of the members and become a menace to the spiritual work of the organization. Straps were excellent appendages to help our fathers pull on their boots, but they were utterly useless when employed to lift the body."

"I see what you mean," she remarked, "and I do not know but that you are right. After last night's affair, I felt as though everything of the sort was wrong, and father felt the same way."

"There's a difference between making a racket and sawing wood," he returned, and then there was silence for some minutes.

When Bently Moore left Emily he turned his steps toward his hotel with a feeling of satisfaction.

"Well, I've seen her two evenings in succession," he remarked to himself. "Whether the lawn party was to be commended or not it paid me to be present, but this evening's talk was worth twice as

much. It just showed me the kind of a girl she is. I'd go 'most anywhere to have her company. I hope that her father will be called to Harksborough."

He had scarcely uttered the words, when turning the corner he passed a man coming from the opposite direction. There was something in his build and carriage that seemed familiar. In a few moments the man crossed the street and went toward Mr. Van Cloud's residence, and Bently Moore followed until he saw him go up the minister's steps, when, catching a side view of his face, he muttered something to himself and walked rapidly away.

"I thought it was Natty Band-Box," he said, as he hastened toward the hotel. "I should like to know what business he has in Westwood, and at that house this time of night. Well, he's got to get off the track or I'll drive so close that he'll feel uncomfortable."

Finding Mr. Ritchie and Mr. Stickler on the hotel porch, Bently Moore drew up a chair and, lighting a cigar, proceeded to give them an account of the service that



he had attended. The mosquitoes were troublesome, and the three men tried to blow the smoke from their cigars in a way that would prevent the insects from coming near, but they seemed to understand the purposes of the men and attacked them at every opportunity.

"How you two men have been able to stand this thing all the evening is more than I can see," remarked Mr. Moore, as he slapped his neck in a vain effort to put one of the mosquitoes out of existence.

"They drive me almost distracted," returned Mr. Stickler, as he waved his hand to and fro in front of his face, "but there isn't any place where you don't find them; besides Ritchie here seems to enjoy them."

"He enjoys everything," put in Bently Moore, as he remembered the lawn party of the previous evening.

"Mosquitoes! Mosquitoes!" returned Mr. Ritchie. "What are you talking about? Pooh! pooh! There aren't any mosquitoes around here; it's all your imagination."

A ten-year-old boy, son of the propri-



etor of the hotel, was seen some fifty feet away. He was under the glare of an electric light, and Mr. Ritchie called him.

“Boy! boy!”

The lad looked up as though expecting reproof, but seeing that Mr. Ritchie was beckoning to him, he reluctantly advanced, fearing lest he should be sent on some errand.

“What’s your name?” Mr. Ritchie asked.

“Dick!” was the boy’s reply.

“Dick!” he repeated. “Well, now, that’s a good name, and it fits a good boy as closely as a night-cap fits a man with a clear conscience. Dick, I saw you over there under the light catching butterflies, and I thought that I’d just call and ask you whether you had seen any mosquitoes anywhere around.”

The boy only grinned in reply, and Mr. Ritchie looked at his friends with a triumphant smile.

“There, you see,” he continued. “If this boy cannot discover any mosquitoes right under that light, how do you suppose

you're going to find any under the shadow of this porch?"

Bently Moore slapped the back of his hand and held up a dead mosquito by one leg.

Without paying the slightest attention to this demonstration, Mr. Ritchie continued, "Now, see here, my boy, I'll tell you what I'll do. You catch as many mosquitoes as you can and bring them to me dead or alive, and I'll give you one cent for every ten of them."

The boy grinned again and went into the house.

"I'll sell you this one," said Mr. Moore, still holding the insect that he had killed, between his fingers.

"I'll give you a dollar for it if that boy earns ten cents," Mr. Ritchie responded. Then he took another puff at his cigar as if to close the subject.

The next day Bently Moore watched his opportunity and made an excuse for calling on Mr. Van Cloud, hoping that he would meet Emily; but a maid came to the door, and he saw only the minister.

Sunday morning was bright and warm. Mr. Ritchie had risen early for the purpose of taking a walk, and was just in the act of lathering his face preparatory to shaving when he was startled by a loud knock at his door. Grabbing a towel, he hastily rubbed the soap from his cheeks and, slipping on a coat, went to give his caller admittance.

To his surprise Dick was standing in the hall. He was holding three large pieces of paper behind his back.

"I say, mister," began the boy, "didn't you say you'd give me a cent for every ten mosquitoes that I'd bring you dead or alive?"

"Why, why—yes, I believe I did say something of the sort," he returned, "but I warrant you couldn't find many. Never mind about that; you've done the best you could, and I'll do the right thing by you; so, under a hundred, I'll give you two cents each; under fifty, I'll give you three cents each. That's fair, I'm sure," and a broad smile played over his features.

The grin of Friday evening again ap-

peared on the boy's face as he produced three large sheets of sticky fly-paper that were literally covered with dead mosquitoes. So many of the insects had met their fate on the adhesive sheets that they were in many places two and three deep.

Mr. Ritchie looked first at the papers and then at the boy, and began rubbing his chin thoughtfully.

"Caught them in the grove back of the house," he explained, "and I reckon that there's near a thousand on each of them papers. You can count them if you like."

"Three thousand," repeated Mr. Ritchie, half audibly.

"Don't know exactly," the boy returned. "There they be; you can count them for yourself."

"Where did you get your paper?" Mr. Ritchie asked.

"Store," he answered, shortly, "Had some chink in me bank on the shelf, and I shook out enough to buy it. Wish I'd shook out more."

"Well, my boy," remarked Mr. Ritchie, "let me say that there's no danger but that



you'll succeed in business when you get older. Next time we have a revival in our church at home, I'm going to recommend fly-paper for use in holding the converts. Do you know what revivals and converts are?"

The boy said "Yep," and grinned again.

Then Mr. Ritchie asked to have the three sheets of fly-paper left that he might count the captives. The boy left them, and he closed the door and sat looking for a long time at the strange graveyards that were spread out before him. He started several times to count, but gave it up. At last he leaned back in his chair and said aloud:

"I declare I'm fairly caught this time, and caught with fly-paper, too, and that by a kid."

Having rolled and wrapped the sheets he set them aside for final disposal. Then he lathered his face again and shaved one cheek. Suddenly stopping in the operation he laid down his razor and said:

"A dollar for Moore, too—good gracious! I don't mind the dollar, but I can



see him now. He'll never let up on me. Good gracious!"

Hurrying through the making of his toilet he went downstairs and, hunting up Dick, handed him two dollars and a half, which was deemed by the boy as full payment for his services. Then he went to the end of the porch and flung the wrapped fly-papers far under the flooring.

He was careful to say nothing about the matter to his companions until they had left Westwood. Then he handed Mr. Moore a dollar and declined to give any information as to the amount he had been obliged to pay the boy, but Moore refused the money on the ground that no scheduled account of the mosquito-catch had been rendered.

## CHAPTER XI

## CLOTHED WITH SIMPLICITY

IT was Mrs. Van Cloud's habit every Sunday to pay particular attention to her husband's personal appearance and readiness for service. So frequently had he forgotten certain small details of dress and equipment that she thought it expedient to "look him over and catechise him," as she said, before allowing him to leave the house.

It so happened that, on the morning when Mr. Ritchie and his friends had arranged to hear him preach, she was confined to her bed through illness. He was greatly disappointed on account of her inability to be present at the service, but the pleasure that he anticipated in again standing before his people and of being not only heard by them, but also by the Harksborough Committee, caused him to

carry a smiling face into the sick-room before leaving his home.

Bending over his wife, he gave her an affectionate kiss, which was returned with a loving embrace.

“Well,” said the minister, “I am very desirous of accomplishing two things this morning. I want not only to help my people, but also to please that church committee.”

“I hope you’ll do both,” she replied. “You’re certainly capable enough to occupy a better pulpit than you do now, and while the people all like you in Westwood, you’ve done your work here and ought to go elsewhere.”

“I’ve known that for over a year,” sighed the man, “but then what could I do? I’ve had some forty-eight letters written for me to various vacant churches, and I haven’t had but one chance to preach as a candidate, and it wasn’t my fault that I didn’t get the Grayton church. You know that. It’s pretty hard on a man when he feels that for the good of the church he is over, as well as for his own

good, he ought to leave, and can't do it on account of bread and butter. It puts a man in the position of preaching not so much to save men as to earn a living. It seems to me that when a minister thinks that his work is done, he ought to be able to make a change; but I suppose things are as they are, and I will have to wait my turn."

He was of a hopeful disposition, so that before withdrawing from the sick-room he turned a cheerful countenance to his wife and said:

"I am going to do the very best that I can this morning. You pray for me while I'm preaching, and all will come out right some way, so good-by," and he bent over and kissed her again.

Before he had reached the door, she called him back with the question: "Woolworth, dear, are you sure that you have everything that you require?"

Though annoyed by the implication, he smiled again and answered with confidence:

"Everything."

"Sure?" she repeated, as though unconvinced by his reply.

"Why, Mary," he returned, "don't you think that I'm old enough to take care of myself?"

"I don't know. Shoes blacked?" she asked.

He lifted one of his feet and showed her the polished leather.

"How about the other?" she laughingly demanded. "You remember that last Easter one of your shoes was blacked and the other hadn't seen a brush for a week."

"Oh, Mary, why do you insist on referring to that so often?" he returned, as he lifted his other foot for her inspection. "You know I was called off that Sunday when I was half through blacking my shoes and forgot all about it."

"I see that you've brushed your hair," she persisted. "Is your cravat fastened down behind?"

He felt back of his collar and made certain that the white band was thoroughly secured under the button.

"How about your sermon?" she asked.



"You've forgotten that more than once and had to send Emily or me home for it."

He drew the manuscript half way out of his pocket in attestation of its presence there, and smiled as he pushed it back.

"Have you brushed your clothes?" she queried, as she picked a thread off his sleeve.

"Oh, I'm all right," he insisted.

"Well, I guess that you'll do," she finally declared as she reached out her arms for another embrace. "Now do your best. I wish I were able to go."

He kissed her again and was about to turn away when she inquired:

"How about your handkerchief? Have you a clean one in your pocket?"

"Handkerchief! handkerchief!" he repeated, as he felt in one pocket after another. "It must be here somewhere."

She laughed triumphantly and said: "I thought that you'd forget something. Go to the dresser in the other room and you'll find one in the right-hand corner of the upper drawer, just back of the collars."

The day was clear and beautiful, the church was well filled with people, the choir sang the opening anthem with unusual sweetness and precision. The clear, pure air from outside came through the open windows. The birds chirped from the tree boughs and from beneath the eaves as though sharing with the congregation in the worship. The minister himself felt unusually well and vigorous, and entered into his part of the service with enthusiastic pleasure. All felt it a privilege to be in the house of God and join their hearts and voices in prayer and praise.

The opening services being concluded, Mr. Van Cloud announced his text and began to speak. Warming up to his subject, he frequently left his manuscript and his thoughts found expression in well-chosen words and phrases. There was not one in the congregation who did not realize that the preacher was giving them an unusually fine sermon.

It was his habit to enforce the truths that he uttered with the use of his hand-

kerchief, sometimes holding it in his outstretched hand and sometimes balancing it on his palm. The people were therefore not surprised, at the expiration of about ten minutes, so see him thrust his hand in his pocket for the usual hemstitched accompaniment to his gestures.

“I tell you, brethren,” he exclaimed, “if we are ever to make our influence felt in this sinful world we must, like children, be clothed with simplicity.” Then, without realizing what he laid hold of, he drew an infant’s shirt from the folds of his coat and held it out before the astonished congregation. Weighing it in his extended hand, with its two diminutive arms hanging down, he proceeded: “We need no other garment to commend ourselves to our fellow men. Adorned with it alone, we unconsciously spread abroad an influence which, if our lives are hid with Christ in God, ever makes for righteousness. Thus we become men of power.”

Convulsed with laughter, the people bit their lips and struggled to suppress an open exhibition of merriment. Several

women bowed their heads on the backs of the seats in front of them, while their shoulders shook in evidence of their efforts at self-control. A number of men were suddenly seized with an impulse to study their hymn-books or gaze at the frescoes on the ceiling.

All unconscious of his mistake, Mr. Van Cloud laid the little garment beside the Bible and proceeded to enlarge on the statement that he had made. Several times he took up the shirt and wiped his face with it, or held it high over his head in earnest appeal. After a time, he noticed that the congregation was inattentive and seemed to have difficulty in preserving a decorous behavior.

Not until the people were dismissed, and he had gathered up his papers, did he discover what he had been using. Then with chagrin and mortification, he fled to a side door and hastening his steps, reached home without meeting any one.

Going to his room he found that instead of opening the upper drawer of the dresser, as he had been told, he had opened



the middle drawer and had taken from the right-hand corner the article that he had used.

When the committee returned to the hotel, Mr. Stickler declared that he would never consent to recommend such a thoughtless man to the consideration of his home church. Mr. Ritchie, while regretting the incident of the morning, thought that it was no more than just to the minister that he should be heard again. Mr. Moore, being moved by two conflicting motives, held his peace. It was, however, agreed that no definite decision should be reached until after the evening's service. In the meantime it was decided to attend the session of the Sunday-school.

When, two hours later, the three men entered the Sunday-school room, they were met by the superintendent, who gave them a hearty welcome and invited Mr. Ritchie to teach Mr. Van Cloud's Bible Class, as word had been brought that the pastor would not be present. Then, turning to Mr. Moore, he asked him to take charge of a class of small boys in the back



of the room. Mr. Ritchie, who was always ready to oblige others, promptly consented to perform the duty assigned to him, and Mr. Moore, observing Miss Emily surrounded by a large class of girls, readily agreed to do what he could. Mr. Stickler was also urged to teach, but declared that he preferred to be in the Bible Class.

The boys who had been assigned to the care of Mr. Moore were restless lads who had had very little home training, and intent only on getting as much enjoyment out of the session as they could. At first they looked at their appointed teacher with misgivings, then with curiosity; finally, seeing that he was not inclined to insist on perfect decorum, they decided to be friendly and listen to what he had to say.

The lesson of the day was the incident of the Martyrdom of Stephen, and Mr. Moore, knowing the boy nature, at once began to tell the story of the stoning with considerable graphic power, drawing lessons and asking questions as he proceeded.

Emily Van Cloud looked up several

times and was delighted to see that the boys had gathered close together about their teacher, and were evidently greatly interested in what he was saying. Mr. Moore himself was well pleased at his success. So real did he make the Bible narrative appear that the passing of time was forgotten and the boys gave a start when they heard the first bell sound from the desk, indicating only five minutes more for study.

"Hurry up, hurry up," said a sandy-haired, freckled-face lad in the corner.

"We won't get through if you don't hurry up," put in a stub-nosed youth next to him.

"Then I'll go on a little faster," returned Mr. Moore, good-naturedly, for he was pleased with their impatience.

"We want to hear about the row; how he stabbed 'em, and how they ate him up," called out a black-haired, black-eyed lad.

"Ate up whom?" Mr. Moore asked.

"Stephen; Stephen!" shouted several at once. "There was an awful row, and we want to hear about it."

"They didn't eat up Stephen," he answered, astonished and perplexed by their words.

"Yes, they did," the class insisted, "'cause he stuck a knife into them. Superintendent said so when he was a-reading."

"You've got things wrong; there wasn't any stabbing or eating," he declared, with positiveness.

"No, we haven't got nothing wrong," they insisted. "Ah, come, hurry up. What yer giving us with there not being a row? Superintendent said that there was, and we want to hear about it."

"No, boys, I can't tell you about any stabbing affair and such a wicked thing as eating Stephen up, because it wasn't so and Mr. Snodgrass never said that it was."

There was pandemonium in the class at once. "We'll prove it! We'll prove it!" they cried. "Give me a Bible," demanded one of them. "Hand over that lesson paper," shouted another. "Go way with his not saying it," broke in a third.

In a moment eight or ten printed pages were thrust in Mr. Moore's face, and as many fingers pointed with assurance to the fifty-fourth verse of the eighth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, and he read with surprise and amusement the words: "When they heard these things they were cut to the heart and they gnashed on him with their teeth."

It was difficult for him to keep from laughing as he explained that he could not portray any such blood-curdling events as they desired, for while there was considerable stone-throwing there was no stabbing or cannibalism.

When the lesson period was over, and the classes faced the desk, a hymn was sung, and Mr. Snodgrass, the superintendent, announced that a stranger from Harksborough was present and would make a brief address, whereupon Mr. Ritchie stepped to the platform. A broad smile lit up his benign countenance, and he rubbed his hands together in real pleasure as he looked into the expectant faces of the teachers and scholars.



By way of collecting his thoughts, he spoke on the lesson of the day, briefly reviewing the school on what they had been considering. Then a happy thought came to him, and he said:

“I see, my young friends, that you have a new singing-book.” He took a copy from the table and turned the leaves. “And I notice that there are quite a number of new and beautiful hymns. Now it’s one thing to sing the words of a Christian song and it’s quite another thing to understand the lines and enter into their meaning and spirit. Here is the hymn that you have just sung. Let me ask how many thought of the meaning of the words that they uttered with their lips.”

Immediately there was a show of hands from all parts of the room; then he continued: “Let me read the refrain and then tell me what it means?”

“Glory be to Salem’s Lord, Christ is King.  
‘Peace on earth, good will to men,’ praises bring.  
Join with angels as they sing,  
‘Glory to our new-born king—Alleluia.’ ”



In a moment a score or more arms were frantically waved in the air, and he selected one of the little girls to answer.

"Christ is King," piped the child.

"Christmas," shouted a boy by way of correction.

"You," said Mr. Ritchie, pointing to another.

"Angels sing about Jesus," was the answer.

A boy in the back of the room arose and waved his hand impatiently. Having received permission to speak, he explained:

"Salem was the place where they burned the witches, and glory be to the Lord of Salem for burning 'em, 'cause Jesus is King."

He looked around with a superior air, and then took his seat expecting a word of approval from the desk.

There was silence for a moment, then one of the girls in an older class giggled.

Mr. Ritchie cleared his throat, rubbed his hands more vigorously, and smiled again; then he said that he was very glad to have so many different opinions, and

he had no doubt but that each one had the right idea in his mind, but did not know just how to express it. So he went on to explain the meaning of the lines, after which he smiled again and sat down.

It was then announced that Mr. Van Cloud would not speak in the evening, but that a Rev. Nathaniel Crane Newhall would occupy the pulpit.

The announcement caused a shadow to pass over Mr. Moore's face. He did not blame the pastor for absenting himself, but he was annoyed that Mr. Newhall should spring up on every occasion.

At the close of the session he went over to where Emily was standing and praised her class, hoping thereby to please her.

On reaching the hotel he declared that it was a waste of time to attend the evening service, as they had all heard Newhall before and were unanimous in the opinion that he was not a suitable man for Harksborough. To this statement the other men agreed, and it was arranged to hear some one else.

## CHAPTER XII

## GETTING RID OF A MINISTER

DURING the next eight weeks the committee had visited Salesbury, Fairfield, Fort Allen, Merchantsville, Saxon's Mills, Bronsons, Jamison's Corners, Dorchester and Lakeville. The course that the men had followed had been arranged by them after carefully reading certain letters and recommendations that had come from prominent men in the denomination.

During their travels they had met some fifteen ministers, whom Mr. Moore had named successively: "The Geyser, Sir Charles Bantam, Skyrocket, Master Gusto, Dominie Muddle, The Excavator, Schoolboy Trite, The Philosopher, Solomon Profundus, Professor Thrills, Prig and Prim, Pastor Grim, Dr. Squab, The Cackler, and Cloud Climber." These, he said, were mere tags, so that identification

might be easy, and were not intended to reflect on the character or usefulness of men. Many of them, he assured his friends, were as good as any one who would be called to the Harksborough Church.

Hotel and boarding-house life had wearied them all, although Bently Moore, being a younger man than his companions, had felt the fatigue the least. Moreover, he had made frequent excursions to Westwood, which gave him so much pleasure that he said he could keep on all winter.

With spirits somewhat depressed on account of their weariness and lack of success, they boarded a train for Slocum City.

Shoving their baggage out of the way, they made themselves as comfortable as they could. Mr. Stickler occupied a place next to Mr. Moore, and Mr. Ritchie sat with a stranger just behind them.

They had traveled for about an hour, when Mr. Ritchie leaned over and nudging his companions said: "I wish that you two men would let me introduce you to the gentleman who sits next to me. We've been having a delightful conversation to-



gether, and he has some information that I am sure will be most useful to us all."

Mr. Stickler and Mr. Moore turned around quickly and looked at the man. He was somewhat past middle life, of rather stocky build, a bullet-shaped head crowned with a heavy growth of gray hair. A broad smile lit up his features as he met the gaze of the men, and Mr. Ritchie at once presented them to him.

After a few general remarks Mr. Moore suggested to Mr. Stickler that conversation could be more easily carried on if the seat-back was turned, so that they could sit facing each other.

"It is certainly a Providence," said Mr. Ritchie, "that I happened to meet Mr. Paulson here. He's just the man to help us in our search for a minister. Our church is looking for a pastor and his pastor is looking for a church, or rather he is looking for a church for his pastor. So there you have it."

"Let me explain," interrupted the man. "You see, I'm a member of the Main Avenue Church of Spartanburg. Our minis-



ter is one of the finest men I ever knew, but somehow or other he doesn't seem to hold the people. Eight years ago, when he came to us, we had big congregations; every one thought that he was a wonder and wanted to hear him. Then the audiences began to drop off until, after two or three years, they weren't any larger than before he came. Then the South Church got a new man and every one was sounding his praises. The fourth year folks were saying that Doctor Brownell wasn't up-to-date. Well, since then it has been pretty hard pulling; the people don't attend the services, the finances are running behind, and nobody seems to take an interest. The doctor himself isn't comfortable. I can see it in the way he acts. Every one concedes that he's an interesting speaker, a good caller, first-class when people are in trouble, and that he can't be beat at funerals and such things; but then you see the church don't go, and we can't afford to let it run down.

“Well, to make a long story short, some of us had a meeting to talk the matter

over. One of the trustees said that it wouldn't do to sacrifice the organization for any man, and proposed that Dr. Brownell be told just the condition of things and be asked to resign; but I said: 'No, that won't do. He's Christian enough to take kindly anything that might be said, but then he's got a family to support, and with no other church in sight it would be an awful blow to him.' I know that such a thing would break me all up, and I'm not half so sensitive as he is. Besides, every one respects him, and a lot of the people in the church love him, and if we should ask him to go his friends would be indignant and would circulate a paper begging him to stay. More than half of the people would sign it. 'Then where would we be? We'd either have to back down and be called hard names or stand our ground and split the church.'

"That's so; that's so," declared Mr. Stickler. "I knew just such a case as that, where it tore the membership to pieces and the minister went off and organized a new church not a stone's-throw

away, and now they have two weak societies shaking fists at each other, instead of one united church doing the Lord's work."

"And when a church quarrel is patched up, it's generally done with fine thread and big stitches," broke in Bently Moore. "Better stop the thing at the beginning."

"Well, that's just what I thought," continued Mr. Paulson, "so I voted against the proposition and put my thinking-cap on, and I came to the conclusion that every minister had his limitations and every church had its limitations. Some men are good for a lifetime in a field; others are good for only ten or five years. Some may be good for only one or two years. And it's the same way with churches. Some churches can keep a pastor forty years, but that isn't to say they all can. The great thing is for ten-year men to get in ten-year churches, and five-year men to get in five-year churches, and so on. Now, our minister has done all that he can do in Spartanburg, and is not to blame because he has lost his grip; and our

church has worked as long as it can with Dr. Brownell, and is not to blame if it doesn't grow. One or the other has come to the line of its limitation, and there must be a change. Furthermore, we who are interested must see that the change is brought about without injury on either side and without ugly accusations or heart-breaks. So I said: 'When our pastor goes, the church will appoint a committee to look up a successor. Let's get in our work first and appoint ourselves a committee to look up a good church for the Doctor and do what we can to secure him a call. Then he can go with the best wishes of the people and leave a united church.' When I explained my views they all fell in with me and we went to work, watching the papers for church vacancies and writing to our friends. Now we've each taken a week off in turn, and are going to see what we can do by personal work. I've been to the Board rooms and talked with the secretaries. They say that they have a long list now of men who want help, but I told them to tear up the list and let



the restless importunates go. If men in places of power would only keep informed and use their influence to prevent divisions and discouragements, instead of trying to help restless preachers to get more loaves and fishes and vacant churches to get something for nothing, they'd do vastly more for the kingdom of Christ than by flooding the country with letters of recommendation."

"You're right," said Mr. Moore. "We've had a perfect raft of communications from the biggest men in the denomination, recommending ministers that are not worth the hearing. I've come to have more confidence in one short letter from an every-day business man than from a dozen doctors of divinity. A first-class business man will judge a minister as he does an employe, by his record and by what he can do; but a parson will judge a minister on the basis of personal liking, and will tell all about the fine preaching qualities of men whom they have never heard. One has pride in having the man he recommends turn out as he said he



would; the other doesn't seem to care as long as he can be accommodating and get a job for a friend."

"Well, this is what I was getting at," continued Mr. Paulson. "The minister, or our church, I don't know which, has reached the limit. I'm inclined to think that it's the church, for Dr. Brownell is a good man and doing the best that he knows how. We need a change, just the same, and propose to have it without division or heartbreak. If the change isn't made peaceably soon, two years from now it will be forced with friction and fire. Now you are looking for a pastor. Call Dr. Brownell. If he does as well by you as he has by us, you won't have any reason to complain. You may travel from Dan to Beersheba and not find his equal."

"We'll have him," said Mr. Ritchie with emphasis.

"What will we do when he has reached his limit with us?" asked Mr. Stickler.

"Do? Why, do just as I and my friends are doing. Get him another field," answered Mr. Paulson. "May be

he won't reach any limit with you."

"Give us his name and address and we'll hear him preach," said Bently Moore.

"I should be very glad to do that," returned Mr. Paulson, "but let me ask you to do just what I told the secretaries to do. Tear up your list, or else put our minister's name at the head. You come to Spartanburg next Sunday and hear him, stay a week or two and inquire about him. You won't hear anything but praise. Then go back and recommend him and tell what you've heard. You'll be doing good by your church as well as by ours."

"We'll be there next Sunday," said Mr. Ritchie.

"No; we're booked for Slocum City next Sunday," broke in Mr. Moore, "and we've half promised to hear Mr. Van Cloud again."

"Well, then, come the first chance you get," urged Mr. Paulson.

"That we'll do," said Mr. Moore. "Leave the date open and we'll do the best that we can and visit you before long, unless something unforeseen prevents."

## CHAPTER XIII

## MR. RITCHIE'S SELFISHNESS

THE train slowed up at a small station and a woman on the opposite side of the car arose and, picking up a pair of crutches, handed them to a little cripple with iron braces on his leg.

The child put the crutches under his arm and sliding off the seat, braced himself against the back of the seat just in front.

"Let me help you," said Mr. Ritchie, as he bent over to where the boy was trying to stand.

The car suddenly came to a stop and the child fell back on the upholstery. He gave a short, low groan and pressed his lips together.

"There, now, don't mind," and Mr. Ritchie picked up the crutches and laid them against the cushion. "Just you put your

arms around my neck and I'll carry you out."

The boy threw his arms around his neck and he carried him out while the woman followed with the crutches and an old valise. Reaching the waiting-room, he put him down on one of the benches.

"There, you're not in pain now, are you?" he asked.

The boy shook his head.

"Well, here's a paper for you to look at," he added as he handed him an illustrated magazine that he had purchased on the train.

The woman expressed her thanks and the child turned his little pale face toward his helper while a wan, languid smile crept over his drawn features and a gleam of gratitude showed itself in his blue eyes.

"Good-by! good-by!" said Mr. Ritchie. "I must catch my car. God bless you. Good-by!" and he went out.

The train was already in motion and he ran after it, hoping to swing himself on the rear platform. The conductor noticed his purpose and called back:

"Don't risk it; you may fall." So he stopped running.

Bently Moore, who was on the forward car, shouted back from the platform:

"Come on the next train. We'll put up at 'The Graham' and take care of your baggage."

On re-entering the passenger-room the woman was profuse in her expressions of regret that his kindness had caused him to miss the train.

"Oh, never mind! never mind!" he replied. "There'll be another along pretty soon."

"Not until evening," she answered, "and that's five hours. The village is a mile and a half over. I know, for I take Phil to the city every week to see the doctor, and we have to wait here to get the stage. It doesn't come over to this train."

"Do you mean to say that that child sits five hours on that hard bench every week?" he asked.

"There's no other way," she answered, "but sometimes he walks around a little with his crutches. That makes a change,



but the doctor doesn't want him to walk much. One time I tried to get the baggage master to put some boards on the truck so he could lie down, but he said it was against the rules. I'm sorry for you, sir, for you're kept here on account of what you did for Phil."

"Oh, don't think about me," Mr. Ritchie returned. "Excuse me for a few moments. I want to see that baggage master," and he went out.

Stepping rapidly to the end of the platform he entered the baggage-room. The man he sought was sitting at a desk making out some papers. He was a heavily built individual, with low brow, stiff bristling hair, and harsh voice. His face wore a kindly expression, but was marked with dogged determination.

"See here," said Mr. Ritchie, "there's a little cripple in the other room who has to wait five hours for the stage before he can be taken over to the village. What can we do to make him comfortable?"

"Nothing," returned the man, without looking up. "There are plenty of seats in

the waiting-room. He can stay there."

"Those seats are too hard for any grown man who has to wait five hours, let alone a child in almost constant pain."

"Can't help it," remarked the man. "It's all the company provides."

"I wish that you'd stop writing for a minute and listen to what I say," said Mr. Ritchie.

The man quickly turned around and glared at his visitor. A deep scowl furrowed his low brow, all signs of kindness passed from his face, and his iron jaws came together in firm determination.

"I know some of the officers of this road," began Mr. Ritchie, "and they are all gentlemen. There isn't one who, if he were here, wouldn't put himself out to help that child. Now if you want to please them, as well as do that which will be of advantage to yourself, you'll show a little consideration for that boy."

A puzzled look came into the man's face and his features gradually softened. He was trying to surmise what officers

were referred to, and what advantage might accrue to himself. Failing to satisfy his mind on these particulars, he said nothing and Mr. Ritchie continued:

“Now I want some sort of arrangement, a truck with some boards and blankets, or perhaps you have some bags of soft stuff in the freight house that would do for the boy to lie on.”

“How would this do?” the man asked as he reached behind the door and drew out an old steamer chair. “I guess I can find some blankets in the freight house, if you need them.”

“Just the thing,” returned Mr. Ritchie. “Let’s go over and see what we can find to cover it,” and they walked to the freight house together.

In a few moments they returned, and the steamer chair was stretched out and covered, and the boy was lifted on it.

Tears of gratitude stood in the child’s eyes as he leaned back on the blankets and looked first at his benefactor, and then at his mother.

The woman tried again to express her

thanks, but Mr. Ritchie insisted that she and Phil had nothing for which to thank him; that he had done what he had from purely selfish motives, as he enjoyed seeing the boy comfortable, and while some men amused themselves by games or races, he amused himself in fixing blankets on trucks.

"Now," said Mr. Ritchie to the baggage master, "I notice you have a telegraph instrument in your room. I would very much like to have you send a message for me."

"Where?" the man asked, as if uncertain whether to comply with the request, or to plead that the instrument could only be used on the business of the road.

"To the village, to the tavern, livery-stable if there is one, anywhere where you can get an easy-going vehicle; order it sent here immediately. I'm going to see that that child gets home comfortably. Let me know the charges."

The man sat down before the instrument and sent the message. A carriage would leave for the station at once. Ex-



penses, two dollars. Telegraphing would cost twenty-five cents. Mr. Ritchie handed the man one dollar and said: "That will pay for your trouble and the message; you may keep the change." Then he went back to the woman and her child.

When the carriage came, the boy was carefully propped up in a seat by his mother, and Mr. Ritchie got in after them. He said that there was plenty of time for him to accompany them; it was pleasanter than staying about the railway station and he could return with the stage when it came to meet the next train.

On reaching the village he had several hours to wait, and he spent part of the time with the woman and her son. She was a widow and very poor, but her home was comfortable and well kept. Before leaving he asked for her name, as he said that he wanted to send Phil a picture-paper occasionally. That evening the woman found a ten-dollar bill carefully hidden under one of the plates on the table, and she sat down and wept. Then



she went into her room, and kneeling by the bedside prayed for her benefactor.

Not many days passed before a monthly magazine, a weekly story-paper and a humorous periodical came to the village post-office bearing Phil's address. As time passed other numbers were received and it became evident that some one had subscribed for them. One day the postmaster handed Phil's mother a letter inquiring after the name and address of the doctor who had charge of the boy. Finally, in about three weeks, the expressman delivered at the widow's house a wheel chair just large enough to fit Phil's little body.

The mother noticed that thereafter, whenever she took her boy to the city for examination, the doctor was very attentive, and a carriage was always in waiting at the station on her return. The next spring the doctor advised that she should spend the summer months at the sea-side with her child. He said that the salt air would strengthen the boy, and playing in the sand would do him good. When she

complained that she was unable to meet the expenses of such a vacation, he said that he knew a gentleman who had friends by the ocean, and that it would cost her nothing.

It was Mr. Ritchie's habit after that to visit the woman and her son every year. and his purse provided many things for their comfort. Phil grew well and strong, and though always lame, was able, in after years, to start a small business through his friend's assistance, and earn a good living for his mother and himself.

It was late that night when Mr. Ritchie reached "The Graham," in Slocum City. His friends had gone to bed, but he found his suit-case in the office and went at once to his room.

## CHAPTER XIV

## THE WRONG AND THE RIGHT WAY

IT was after a long, dull sermon by a Dr. Bachleman in the Parkway Church of Slocum City, that the three men returned to their hotel wearied and discouraged. The weather was growing cold with the approach of autumn. They had not provided themselves with heavy garments and they felt uncomfortable and critical. Dr. Bachleman had been highly recommended to them, and they had cherished bright hopes that at last they had found the right man, but he had proved a failure so far as availability for the Harksborough Church was concerned. They looked over their list again, and found that those who had been most highly praised had been heard. They were to listen to Mr. Van Cloud again, and there was Dr. Brownell, of Spartanburg. He might prove accept-

able but experience had made them skeptical.

After dinner they met in Mr. Ritchie's room to consider what they should do next.

"I tell you, gentlemen, I'm completely fagged out," declared Mr. Stickler, as he brought his fist down on the table with a force that made the other men start. "You can go on this wild goose chase all winter, if you want to, but I'm going home."

"Wild goose," repeated Mr. Moore under his breath, as though considering something. Then he remained looking at the floor, and Mr. Ritchie asked:

"You propose giving up the job?"

"Give it up for once and for good," asserted his companion. "This running around all over the creation isn't what it's cracked up to be. Selecting a pastor by committee is a very pretty procedure for the church, it relieves the members of all further responsibility, but it's too hard on the men that are appointed to do the work; so I propose that we quit, write out a report embodying our experiences, de-

scribing the ministers that we've heard, hand it in, and throw up the job. After that the church can select whom it pleases or appoint another committee. We've done our share; now let others take their turn at it."

"That would be a straight backdown," returned Mr. Ritchie. "I want to quit as much as you do, but I'll be hanged if I want to confess that I've made a failure of the work. The truth is, you and Moore are altogether too finical. If I'd been alone I'd found a man long ago. Almost any of the preachers that we've heard would have done well enough. Besides, there's Van Cloud and Brownell; what are you going to do about them? We've half promised Van Cloud that we'd visit Westwood again, and we told Paulson that we'd hear Brownell unless something unforeseen should occur. I suppose that, after listening to them, we could make out a list of all the ministers that we know about, pick out the best in the bunch, and recommend him. If we can't agree on who is the best, we can throw up



a cent and decide in that way. You remember the first disciples selected Matthias by casting lots. We can't go very far astray, for all the men that we've heard are good. Of course the preacher we commend won't please all the people, but they can't do any more than find fault with our judgment, and we don't claim to be infallible, you know."

"Well, my way may seem to be a back-down, as you say," Mr. Stickler replied, "but it's honest and that's more than can be said of your scheme. To recommend a man on the flip of a coin and then say that he's the best that we've heard may be easy, but it doesn't seem to me to be a very honorable way of meeting a responsibility. Better declare at once that the contract was a bigger one than we could handle, and then back out. We don't want to do as those Silverton people did. They got into a jangle over whom they should have, and tried to settle the difficulty with a pack of cards. When they found that the card method was considered sacrilegious, they wrote the names of all the

available candidates on slips of paper and put them in a hat. The first name drawn was selected, and you know what kind of a minister they got! Wasn't fit to preach to a herd of cattle!"

"That might be all so," interrupted Mr. Ritchie, with a chuckle, "and yet he might be entirely fit to preach to the people who called him."

"Well, we've done our duty," insisted Mr. Stickler, "and there's nothing more to do but go home and see if others will do any better."

Bently Moore had been sitting tipped back in his chair. His eyes had been fixed on the carpet. He seemed to take little interest in the conversation, yet he had heard everything that had been said and was only waiting for an opportune moment to speak. When, therefore, there was quiet, he brought his chair to an upright position, and rising, went over to where his friends were sitting.

"See here," he said, as he put his hand on Mr. Stickler's shoulder. "You're both good men, and you both want to do

the best thing by the Harksborough Church, but it's my opinion that we're all off the track. It's true that we've taken a great responsibility, but then, we've taken it, and it would be wrong both to our church and to ourselves to back out because we find it hard. Of course we can't declare that any man is the best man on the turning of a cent or the drawing of a slip. Mr. Ritchie didn't recommend any such procedure earnestly; he was only joking. Brethren, I've been doing a lot of thinking the last few weeks, and I've come to the conclusion that we'll never find the right man by going on as we have. Sermons are all well enough in their place, but they are not always messages from the Almighty, as is claimed. Sometimes they're nothing more than advertisements. I hope that they are not often such, but I fear candidating sermons are apt to be that kind, whether the preacher stands in the pulpit of a pastorless church, or before a committee in his own church. Preachers have their way of advertising just as business men have, and we've been duping

ourselves by judging them by their pulpit performances. We don't measure a merchant by his newspaper displays; why should we a preacher by his pulpit displays? The truth is, we've been looking all these weeks for a minister, rather than for a man, a divinely appointed man. It's my firm conviction that some men are appointed by God to the prophetic office to-day just the same as of old, and some are called by circumstances or inclination to the ministerial profession. I don't care whether a preacher uses a manuscript or does not. I don't care whether he has a command of language or halts and stumbles, if only he's been sent to me by God. I want to be sure of that. Now I say let us begin where we should have begun three months ago. Start right. We'll never find a man until we do."

"How's that?" Mr. Stickler asked.

"Decide definitely what we most need in Harksborough. Perhaps we don't know, but we must use the best judgment that we have. If the men that we've heard so far don't meet the requirement, discard



them one and all, then let us get to work in the Scriptural way to find a suitable man. We've been playing hop, skip and jump with our responsibilities long enough; now let us begin to use our brains and hearts."

"I'll tell you where the shoe pinches," said Mr. Ritchie with a smile. "You and Stickler want a ten-thousand-dollar man for two thousand and parsonage, and of course it's hard to find him."

"That's what we all want, and that's what most vacant churches are looking for: something for nothing with a false estimate of valuation," returned Bently Moore. "Now let us get the idea of salary out of our minds altogether, if we can, and come to some definite conclusion as to what kind of a man our church really needs."

"If I remember rightly," remarked Mr. Stickler, "we tried to do that before we left home, when we sent out all those slips. You know the result: almost as many opinions as there were members."

"The congregation has nothing to say



about the matter now; the members will all have a chance to say yes or no when their turn comes. It's our innings now," returned Mr. Moore.

"What kind of a minister do you think Harksborough needs?" Mr. Ritchie asked.

"Well, it seems to me," returned Mr. Moore, "that our church needs a manly man who is spiritually minded and thoroughly in earnest about working for Christ. My experience has led me to believe that nearly all ministers are good men, honestly trying to do God's work in the best way that they can; they have their faults and their disagreeable traits, so have we. Human nature is imperfect and every one has his limitations. Of course our church needs a reasonably intelligent man. We don't want a ninny nor a twaddler, but the idea that he must be scholarly and have unusual oratorical ability and be a good organizer and financier and pastor and mixer and all that, is nonsense. He can't be everything, but if he has heart power and sincerity it is enough."

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, and though I understand all mysteries and all knowledge,” quoted Mr. Ritchie.

“That’s it exactly,” the young man agreed.

“Mustn’t he have some snap?” Mr. Stickler asked.

“Yes,” responded Mr. Moore, “but I said that he should be thoroughly in earnest about working for Christ. I think that covers snap. People talk about having a passion for preaching, and a passion for souls, and a passion for truth, and I don’t know what all besides, but it seems to me that if a man has a passion for Christ he will have it all, and no one will ever have a passion for Christ who has not at some time seen him.”

“Seen him!” exclaimed both the men together.

“Yes, seen him,” repeated Mr. Moore. “The heart has eyes to see. We need a man who inspires men to follow the Savior because he has himself been inspired to follow him.”

"Mustn't he be orthodox?" Mr. Stickler asked.

"I'll risk the orthodoxy of such a man," returned Mr. Moore.

"You say that we can't find the kind of man that we need by hearing sermons. How then can we find him?" Mr. Ritchie inquired.

The enthusiasm that had showed itself in the young man's speech seemed suddenly to pass away as with lowered voice and deep solemnity he said: "By prayer and faith and in no other way."

There was silence for a few moments. Then Mr. Moore continued: "Brethren, we've been on the wrong track. We've been asking God for guidance and judgment and all that; but our prayers have been brief and perfunctory. Forgive me if I misjudge either of you. I simply make the assumption on the basis of my own feelings and conduct. Now, if you both agree, I propose that we hear no more preaching for the present, with the idea of getting a pastor, but that we definitely decide what kind of a minister we

need at home, then meet every morning after breakfast, spend an hour or more in specific prayer that he may be revealed to us, thanking God for success promised but not yet realized and then commune with Him while we pursue our investigations."

The men made no reply, and Bently Moore went on.

"It is my belief that our church requires a man who is profoundly conscious of Christ's presence and power and who is in deep sympathy with the hopes and sorrows of his fellow men."

Mr. Ritchie looked up at his young friend and with a seriousness that was unusual to him, said, "Moore, you make me feel like a fool, after all the tramping I've been doing. You've got the levelest head among us."

Mr. Stickler said nothing, and Bently Moore turned and asked him whether what he had said was not true.

"True as gospel," was his approving answer.

"Well, then," continued Mr. Moore,



“let us begin at once to get on the right track. We’ve made no engagement for this afternoon.”

Mr. Ritchie got down on his knees and buried his face in his hands. Mr. Stickler followed, and Bently Moore brought a chair and knelt near his companions.

There was silence for some time, after which Bently Moore thanked God for the surety of His promises and uttered a brief but earnest petition, in which he asked forgiveness for all past self-reliance and mistaken dependence on human judgment, and pleaded with God for direction in days to come.

Then Mr. Ritchie and Mr. Stickler prayed, and there was another period of silent waiting, broken only at intervals by brief, heartfelt expressions of faith and appeals to heaven for help.

Never before had the three men come so close together. Never before had they felt so heavily the responsibility of their commission and their utter helplessness, yet somehow strength came to them in their sense of weakness, and they rose



from their knees with a confidence in ultimate success that they had not felt since beginning their work.

As the days of the week passed, they met every morning for prayer. Nothing was said about the next minister on the list; indeed, it is doubtful whether they would have remembered that they had a list, had not the fact been recalled to them by a letter that they received from Mr. Paulson, urging them to hear Dr. Brownell as soon as possible. The letter was answered by Bently Moore, who told his correspondent that something unforeseen had happened, and while it was possible that they might visit Spartanburg soon, nothing was definitely decided and would not be immediately.

## CHAPTER XV

## A YOUNG MAN'S VISION

WHEN Saturday came they went to Bradford, a thriving little city a short distance away.

It was late when they reached the place and they went at once to the leading hotel where they found a letter awaiting them from Deacon Brant, of Harksborough, telling them of the temporary illness of Mr. Goodman and asking for a pulpit supply for two or three weeks.

Sunday morning was clear and bright. A crisp breeze came from the north, but the warm sun tempered the air so that they felt fresh and hopeful as they entered the doors of the Folsom Avenue Church. The regular pastor was away, and it was not until they were comfortably seated half way down the aisle that they observed the Rev. Nathaniel Crane Newhall in the pulpit. He was dressed, as usual, with

great care and had, if possible, a more self-sufficient manner than he had when they heard him at Vinton Village.

They had attended the service with longing for a clearer sense of the divine presence, and their hearts sank within them when they saw who was to preach, for they felt sure that Mr. Newhall's main object would be, not the spiritual uplift of the congregation, but the creation of a favorable impression regarding himself. And that his sermon would consist of a few polished platitudes, some striking quotations, a verse or two from the poets, a half-dozen commonplace illustrations uttered in a deep voice with a show of scholarship, and then they would be sent home with a sense of wasted time.

As they left the church that morning they felt disappointed and heart sick, but said nothing in criticism of the sermon. They wanted bread and felt that they had been given husks. That afternoon they spent an hour in prayer and then went out for a walk. When the time for evening service came, they sought a small

meeting-house on a side street where a few plain people were assembled for worship. An old man led the devotions, and then spoke in a simple, straightforward way about the need of separation from sin and spiritual growth. There was nothing striking about the sermon. The truths that he uttered were old and well understood, but a feeling of deep conviction seemed to possess his soul, and his appeals were evidently sincere. In closing, he told the story of Charlotte Elliot's conversion, and asked the people to sing the hymn that she had written:

"Just as I am without one plea."

It was a fitting close of the day and the three men left the church stronger and better able to meet the duties of the week.

On their way back to the hotel they met the people of the Folsom Avenue Church returning to their homes. On passing the building they saw Mr. Newhall in the vestibule. He was talking with some gentlemen in a strained, restless way and seemed anxious to separate himself from their



company. In a few moments he hurried past them. His mind was evidently pre-occupied, for he did not recognize their presence.

They watched him until he had reached the corner, then Mr. Moore said:

“By the way, brethren, whom shall we send to Harksborough to supply the pulpit next Sunday? Deacon Brant said in his letter that candidates were not wanted until we had found the right man.”

“I don’t know,” returned Mr. Stickler, “unless we try to induce the minister we heard this evening to go. He’ll do our people good.”

“He gave notice that he wouldn’t be home next Sunday,” Mr. Ritchie remarked, “and that a man by the name of Slosson would take his place. He evidently has some other engagement for that day, so he’s out of the question.” Then, as if a sudden inspiration had come to him, he said: “Let’s hurry up and overtake Newhall and ask him. He certainly could not be regarded as a candidate, and he would do for one Sunday at least.”



In a moment they were by the young man's side, and broached the subject of his preaching. He seemed annoyed at their presence and listened to their request without appearing to fully comprehend what they wanted. His mind was evidently engaged on some other subject, and he was in haste to get away from them. As they pressed for an answer he said:

"Yes, I suppose that I could go to Harksborough. Let me see. That's on the Eastern Central Road. Couldn't you find some one else? I should greatly prefer to be quiet next week."

Surprised at his unwillingness, they urged him to accept their invitation. At last he consented, more perhaps to prevent further urging than from any desire to preach.

Then he begged to be excused, and hastening his steps, turned a corner, while the three men proceeded to their hotel.

Mr. Newhall walked about half a mile and entered a city park. After wandering aimlessly about for some time he sat

down at the end of an empty bench and threw his arm over the back. Then he buried his face in his sleeve and remained motionless for a long time. The crowds moved up and down the pathway, but he saw them not. Occasionally some one seated himself at the other end of the bench that he occupied, but he did not lift his head. Young men and women laughed and talked in loud tones, but he did not seem to hear them; strollers brushed against his coat and feet, but he was unconscious of any disturbance. Boys and girls shouted to one another as they ran near him, but he was as one in a dream.

The people who had left the Folsom Avenue Church that day, dissatisfied and critical, did not realize that, within the breast of the self-conscious pedant who had spoken to them, was the spirit of a true man who, though conceited and praise-loving, was yet dissatisfied with his own performances, and realized more keenly than any one in the congregation that he had failed to fulfill his calling.

The sermon that he had preached in the morning had been prepared with great care, but with little prayer. He felt in his soul that what it contained was in accord with the beliefs of the denomination to which he belonged, but yet it had not reached nor helped the people, and, in the light of after thought, it seemed a mockery. Not a few had come forward and congratulated him on his effort and some had spoken flatteringly of his illustrations and quotations, but a voice within told him that his work had ended in failure.

All day long he heard that same voice condemning and charging him, and he would have been glad to have remained away from the evening service, but he had been engaged to preach, and preach he must. Spurring himself for a second effort he tried to be less formal, and to throw more earnestness and enthusiasm into his words, but it was in vain—he could not force spiritual power.

For a long time after he had seated himself in the park his mind seemed to be in darkness. The fogbanks of doubt and

questioning gathered about him from every side. He wondered whether he had ever spoken the truth from the pulpit, for truth, he said to himself, could only be spoken by one who was himself true. Perhaps he had mistaken his calling. He prayed for light, but no light came; he prayed for guidance, but no path opened before him; he prayed for strength, but he felt weak.

Then a vision of his life swept before his memory. He saw himself a little freckle-faced boy, playing on the green in front of the village school-house. Suddenly he heard the sound of a bell, and, looking up, saw a woman standing in the doorway. Recess was over. The vision changed, and he was in the Sunday-school. His teacher had turned her back for an instant, and he tore a blank leaf from the Bible and began to roll it in wads to snap across the room. The superintendent called for singing. A bright-eyed girl, with braid of flaxen hair and blue ribbon looked over her book at him from the other side of the room. He crowded the paper



in his pocket and began to shout the words of the hymn that had been announced.

The vision changed again, and he was in his mother's arms confessing a falsehood with tears of penitence and promises of future truthfulness. It was evening, and he knelt to say his evening prayer, and as he prayed he felt the pressure of his mother's hand. Oh, that was living! Would he ever live again surrounded by that which was pure and true and real?

The vision changed again and he was in the house of mourning, and stood beside that same loved parent looking at the silent face of a revered father, and he heard the mother say: "Nathaniel, I must lean on you now; we two are all that are left. God has given us to each other." That evening they talked together about the dead, and he remembered how he had declared with emphasis that he should always be proud of the name he bore, when his mother answered: "Be thankful for it and try to so live that your father would approve of your behavior were he still on the earth."



The vision changed again. He was hastening home from college to speak his last sad farewell to that same mother whose life was fast ebbing away. He reached her bedside, looked into her pale face, and grasped her thin hand. Could he ever forget the words she spoke? It was her dying message, yet he had neglected it. "Learn to preach, my boy," she whispered, "beneath the shadow of the cross. You must see and hear Christ before you can deliver His message."

The vision changed again, and he was kneeling near a pulpit desk in a village church. Ministers, long in service, were reaching forth their hands. As one prayed they rested their fingers on his head, and he felt as though God was sealing him to a holy service.

Three years had passed, and he had in pride and self sufficiency denied his mother's teaching and dying message; denied his early profession and purposes at ordination. He had let self crowd out a vision of Christ. He had been successful in his calling in large congregations and

flattering compliments were evidences of success. The village church of which he had been pastor had grown to the limit of possibility, and he had become restless and ambitious to occupy some more commanding pulpit, and now, under the revelation of the Spirit, he had come to see how false he had been to Christ. "Fool that I am," he cried. "This life I am living is not the fulfilment of a divine ministry; it is the pursuit of a business which, while I hope to do good in the world, I am seeking first a name for myself, and then an increased income to gratify my selfish desires."

Some one shook him by the shoulder and looking up he saw a policeman who told him that it was midnight and he must move on. The crowds had disappeared, and the stars were shining brightly as he rose and returned to the small hotel where he was being entertained. As he entered, a sleepy clerk looked up for a moment, and a bell boy watched him as he ascended the stairs.

Going to his room he closed and locked

the door, and fell upon his knees before the bed.

Early in the morning some one passed his room and knocked at a door a short distance down the hall and called the hour. He arose from his knees as though he himself had been called and went to the window. The stars had gone out and a gray sky wrapt the houses as in a shadow. He stood for a moment looking out into the lifting darkness. Then he threw himself on the bed and slept for an hour.

## CHAPTER XVI

## CALLED OF GOD

MONDAY the committee visited Spartanburg. They had no special interest in the trip, but went under a sense of obligation. On reaching the place, they found that Dr. Brownell had contracted a severe cold and left home for a short vacation among the pines of New Jersey. After making a few inquiries regarding his ability as a preacher and his success as a parish worker, and finding that every one spoke in the highest terms of his character and services, they went to Westwood.

On the same evening that they reached the place Bently Moore called on Emily. Mr. Van Cloud had in some way obtained the impression that the call was intended for him and remained in the room, much to the annoyance of both the young people.

At the prayer-meeting that week Mr. Van Cloud spoke with unusual fervor and power, and a deep spiritual impression seemed to pervade the service. At the close one of the officers of the church arose and announced that he had something to say to the pastor. Then he stated that on account of his faithful service and the large growth of the church under his ministry, it had been voted to increase his salary and extend the period of his summer's rest.

After a brief reply by the surprised minister, some one started the hymn,

"Blest be the tie that binds  
Our hearts in Christian love."

Then the people went forward and shook hands with their pastor.

"This is no place for us," said Mr. Stickler on the way back to the hotel. "God evidently doesn't intend our church to have Van Cloud. I think we're shut up to Brownell."

"It would be wicked for us to call Van Cloud after what happened to-night," Mr.



Ritchie replied. "But where's Moore?"

"Moore, Moore! Why the last that I saw of him," returned Mr. Stickler, "he was talking to the minister's daughter over by the organ."

The walk from the church to the parsonage generally took about five minutes, but on that particular night Bently Moore and Emily did not seem to be able to traverse the ground in less than half an hour, but finally they reached the house and instead of entering, walked up and down several times.

"Miss Emily," said Moore, "you do not know how glad I was to be present at the meeting to-night. The action of the church in raising your father's salary and increasing the length of his vacation was fine, and the kind words that were spoken were well deserved."

"Yes," returned the girl, "father loves his work and loves the people, but sometimes they are so unresponsive that he gets discouraged. This expression of their appreciation will make him another man. He has been an optimist most of the time;

now he will be one all the time. If churches would only realize it, they could make their pastors twice as efficient as they are by giving them encouragement and a helping hand."

"In other words," said Mr. Moore, "it's unreasonable for a church to throw ice water at its pastor and then blame him for shivering."

Emily laughed, and he continued: "I had hoped that your father might become our pastor at Harksborough, but now he is to receive more salary than we give and has a new bond of attachment in Westwood."

"There's Mr. Newhall," she suggested. "I think that you could get him. Father says he's had the best kind of home training and a good education."

"Perhaps so," he responded rather shortly. "He may be thoroughly competent to pick up a stone, but he can't throw it. We want some one with more experience."

The reply silenced her for a moment; then she remarked: "Well, it's too late

for father now. He wouldn't leave Westwood for any church."

Mr. Moore made no reply until they reached the gate in front of Mr. Van Cloud's house, when he took her hand and looked down into her bright eyes, that seemed brighter and more attractive under the light of the full moon that cast its rays over the houses and through the branches of the trees. He imagined that he could detect a heightened color in her cheek. However that might have been, her hand stayed within his grasp without resistance.

"Too late for us to secure your father as our pastor," he said. "Yes, I know, but not too late, is it, for me to call *you* to Harksborough?"

"Me!" she exclaimed, with a quick, nervous little laugh, as she glanced up at him, but made no effort to withdraw her hand. "I'm not a minister! I couldn't preach! Your pastor! How ridiculous!"

"No, not as my pastor," he returned, "but as my—my wife. If you will, I'll

minister and you can preach. You do not know how much I love you."

She glanced toward the house and then said: "Come, let's walk around the block once more. It's too pleasant to go in yet." Another half hour passed and they again reached the gate. Then, before she left him, he had put his hands each side of her face and bending down, kissed her.

The next afternoon, Bently Moore called on Mr. Van Cloud and told him of his love for Emily. The minister was surprised at what he heard, but declared that it would be useless for him to say anything against her marriage, even if he had any desire to do so, which he had not, for his daughter had had her own way ever since she was a child, and it was too late now to begin interfering with her wishes.

As the three men turned into Main Street the next Sunday morning on the way to church, they noticed Mr. Van Cloud some distance ahead of them, hurrying to his appointment. On the corner of Salmon Street was a large saloon, notorious as being frequented by the most fash-



ionable drinkers and gamblers of the town. As the minister approached the place he was stopped by a newspaper reporter, who requested some information for publication. Without realizing how his action might be construed, he thoughtlessly stepped aside with the young man to avoid the jostling of passers by, and stood talking to him at the very entrance of the drinking place. He did not see Mr. Ritchie and his friends as they drew near, but they noticed him, and Mr. Moore, taking in the situation at once, hastened to the minister's side and heartily shaking hands with him, hurried him along on pretext of having something to communicate.

Nothing happened to disturb the service of the sanctuary that day. The sermon was well planned, thoughtful and earnest, and delivered in a way to command the attention of all. It was, however, noticed that he used no handkerchief in his gesticulations.

That same Sabbath Rev. Mr. Newhall preached in Harksborough. He had reached the town late the evening before,



so that he saw no one except one of the officers of the church and the chorister, who had come to make sure of his arrival and to arrange about the service.

There was a good congregation when he entered the church. Few were aware who was to preach.

He seemed deep in thought as he stepped on the platform and took his seat. His manner was quiet, dignified and simple. He announced the hymns as though they constituted part of a sacred service. He read the Scriptures with great deliberation, and with an expression that indicated that their teaching had taken possession of his soul; and he prayed, or rather talked with God as though He were really present and as though he were speaking to a Father who knew the needs of the congregation, and waited to pour out a blessing.

When he announced the text there was perfect attention. The opening services had created a spirit of expectancy, and all the people waited as for a divine message and they were not disappointed.

He spoke from the Gospel of Matthew, the twenty-eighth chapter and the last part of the twentieth verse. When he had uttered the words: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world," he paused, and then, as if experience had brought Christ very near to his life, he said: "That is true. Men sometimes think that they are religious because they possess emotions, but they are not religious unless they possess God." Then he proceeded to speak of the living, wonder-working Christ, whose presence should be realized in the marts of trade, in the quiet of the home, in the routine duties of the school-room, and in the work and worship of the sanctuary. The sermon did not show any great depth of thought, but rather a great depth of conviction and realization of responsibility, so that every one felt that he spoke, not of theories, but of experiences. There was no attempt at show, nor repetition of pious phrases, nor oratorical display, nor effort to impress the congregation with a sense of the preacher's importance. He appeared

only as a heavenly envoy to whom had been intrusted a message of grace.

Never had there been such quiet attention. Even the children seemed to be impressed by the solemn stillness of the place, and the interest of their elders, and were less restless than usual.

When the sermon came to a close, the preacher lifted his hands in a call to prayer and every head was bowed, not in formal reverence, but in hallowed devotion.

The people turned from the church that morning and went to their homes with a strange quiet filling their souls, a heavenly light showing itself in their eyes and a new expression in their faces. They had met God.

Then one and another began to ask questions: "Who is he?" "What is his name?" "Can he not be secured for this church?" Some, more anxious than others, sought him out and broached the subject of a call, but he answered, "No! The impression made by the preaching of a sermon is not a sufficient ground for a call. I know little of the needs of your

church, and you know nothing about my ability to meet those needs. Your desire to have me as your pastor is not born of prayer, but is the expression of an impulse which may, or may not, be of God. Let us both wait on our Heavenly Father and seek wisdom from above; then in due time the Holy Spirit will make the way clear."

But the tide of desire deepened with passing days, until letters were dispatched to Mr. Ritchie and his companions to pursue their investigations no further, for the members of the church were of one mind. Others letters were sent to Mr. Newhall urging him to accept a call, or at least visit Harksborough again.

Mr. Newhall preached another Sunday, then he probed the people with questions regarding their ambitions, purposes, and willingness to be led into a more earnest service of Christ. Finally he consented to consider a call to the pastorate.

It was not long before he assumed the responsibilities of his new field of labor; bringing to it a spiritual force that had become his through personal consecration

and communion with God, and that led to a deeper religious life among the members of the church.

He was always earnest and active, buoyant and cheerful; but when questioned as to his religious experiences he grew serious and thoughtful and answered with some reference to the Scriptures. To one, who asked where he was converted, he replied, "I sought Christ at Baldwins, but He found me at Bradford." To another, who asked him where he received his ministerial training, he said, "I studied at Thornley College and Santonbury Seminary, but it was at Bradford that I received my commission to preach."

THE END







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